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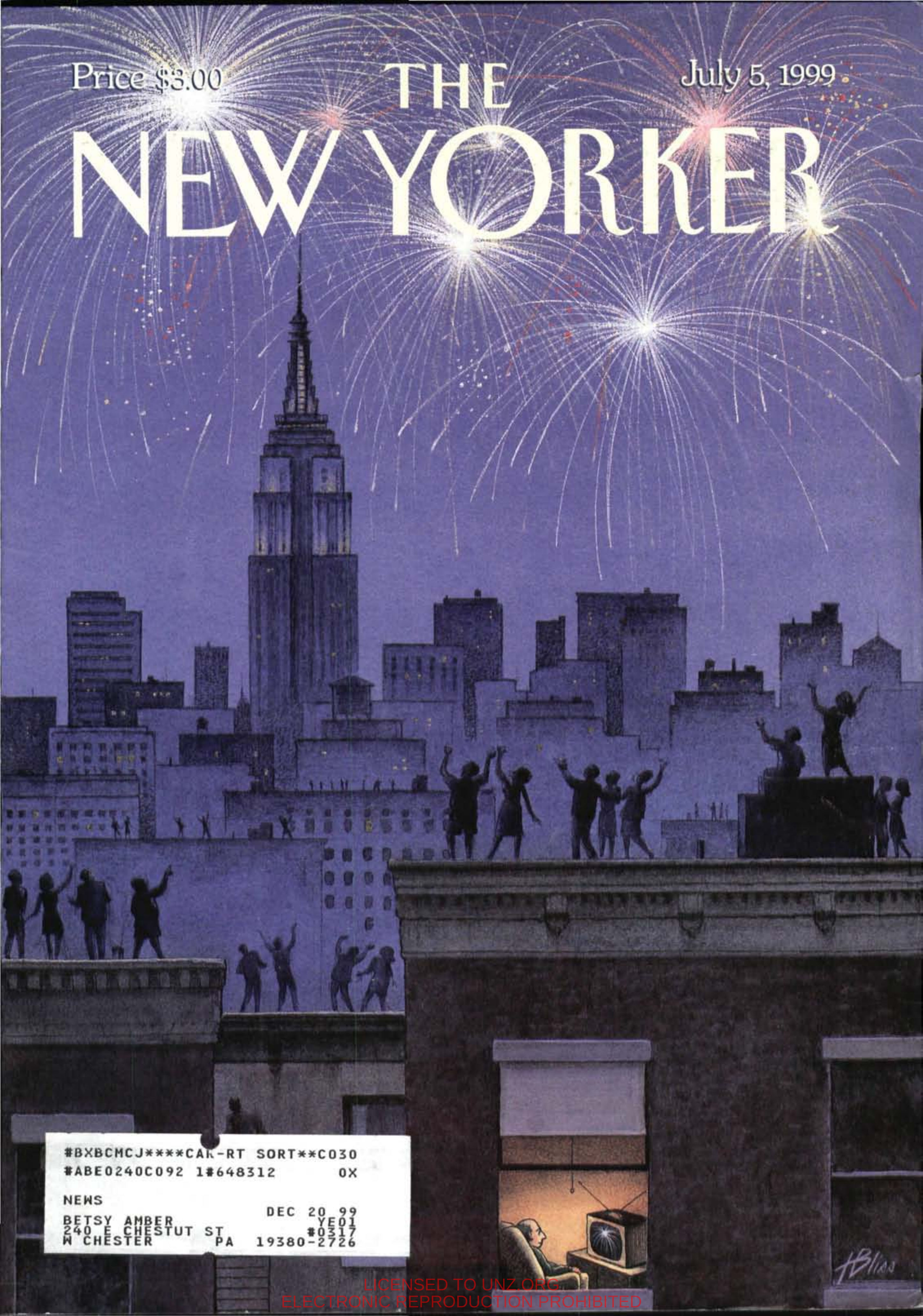
THE NEW YORKER

July 5, 1999



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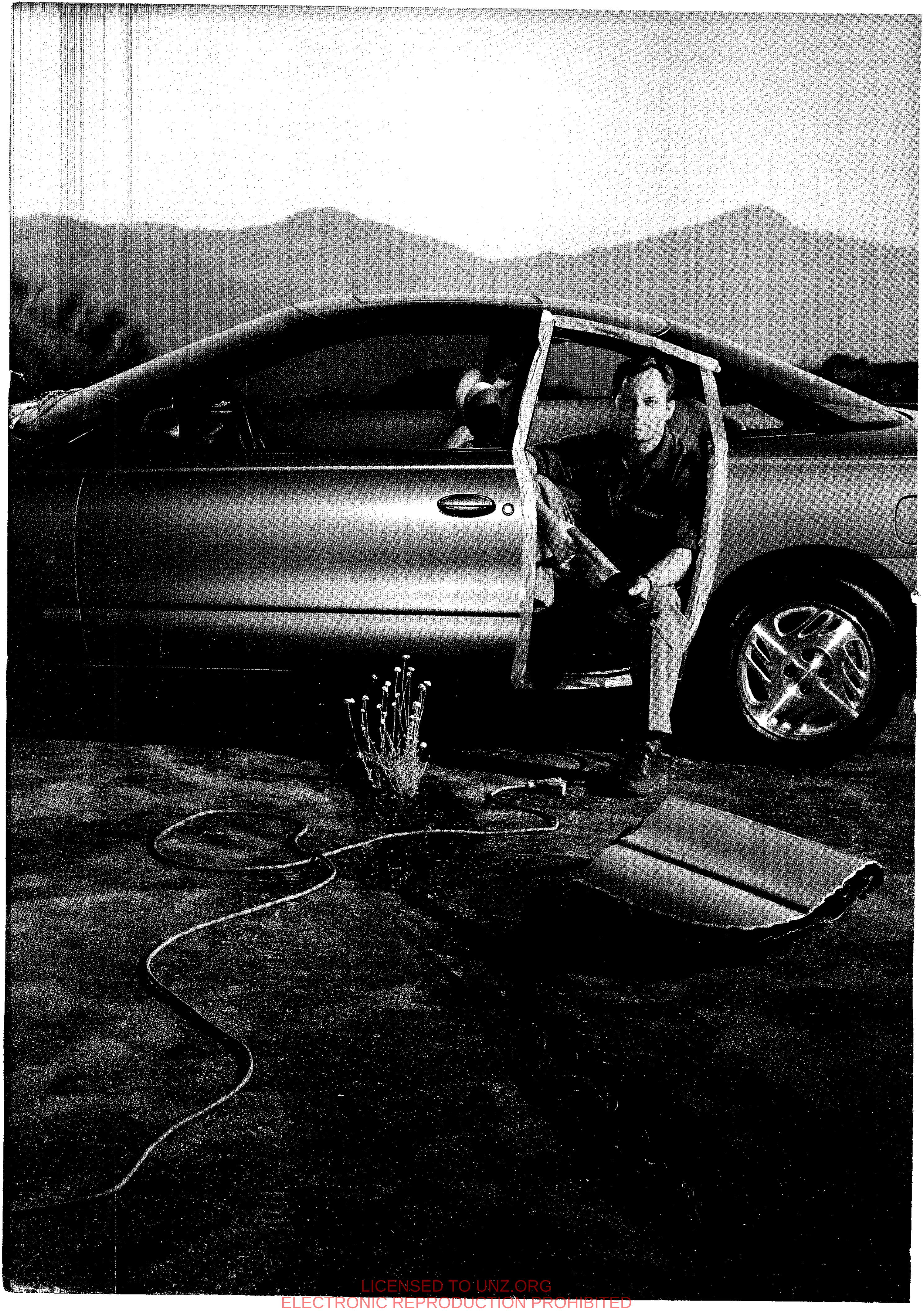

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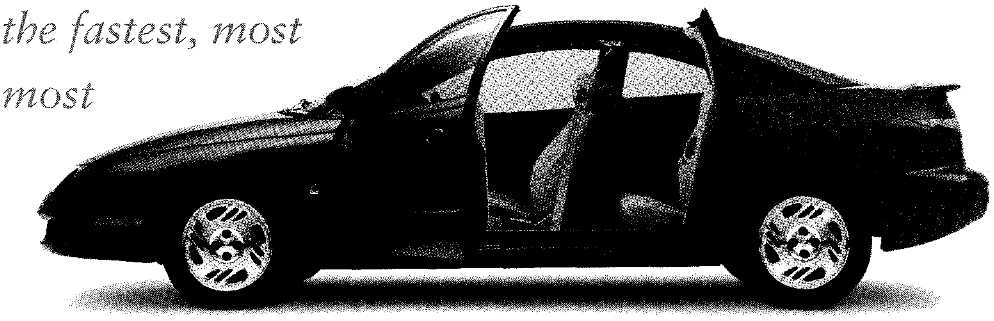

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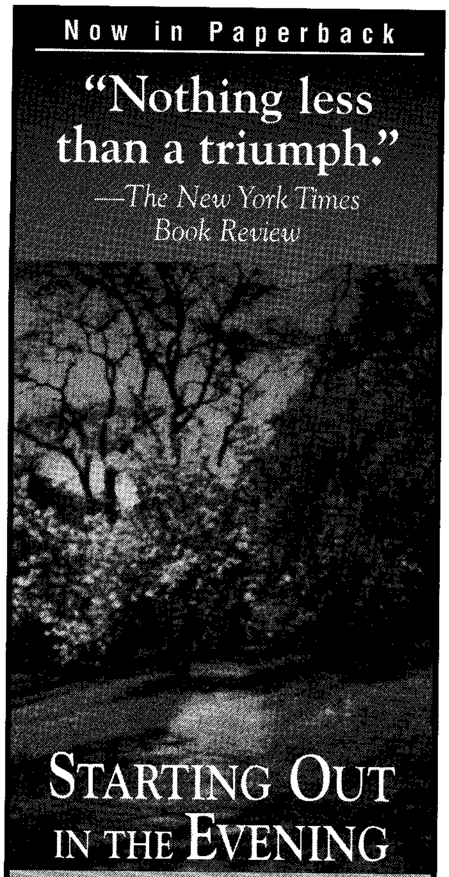

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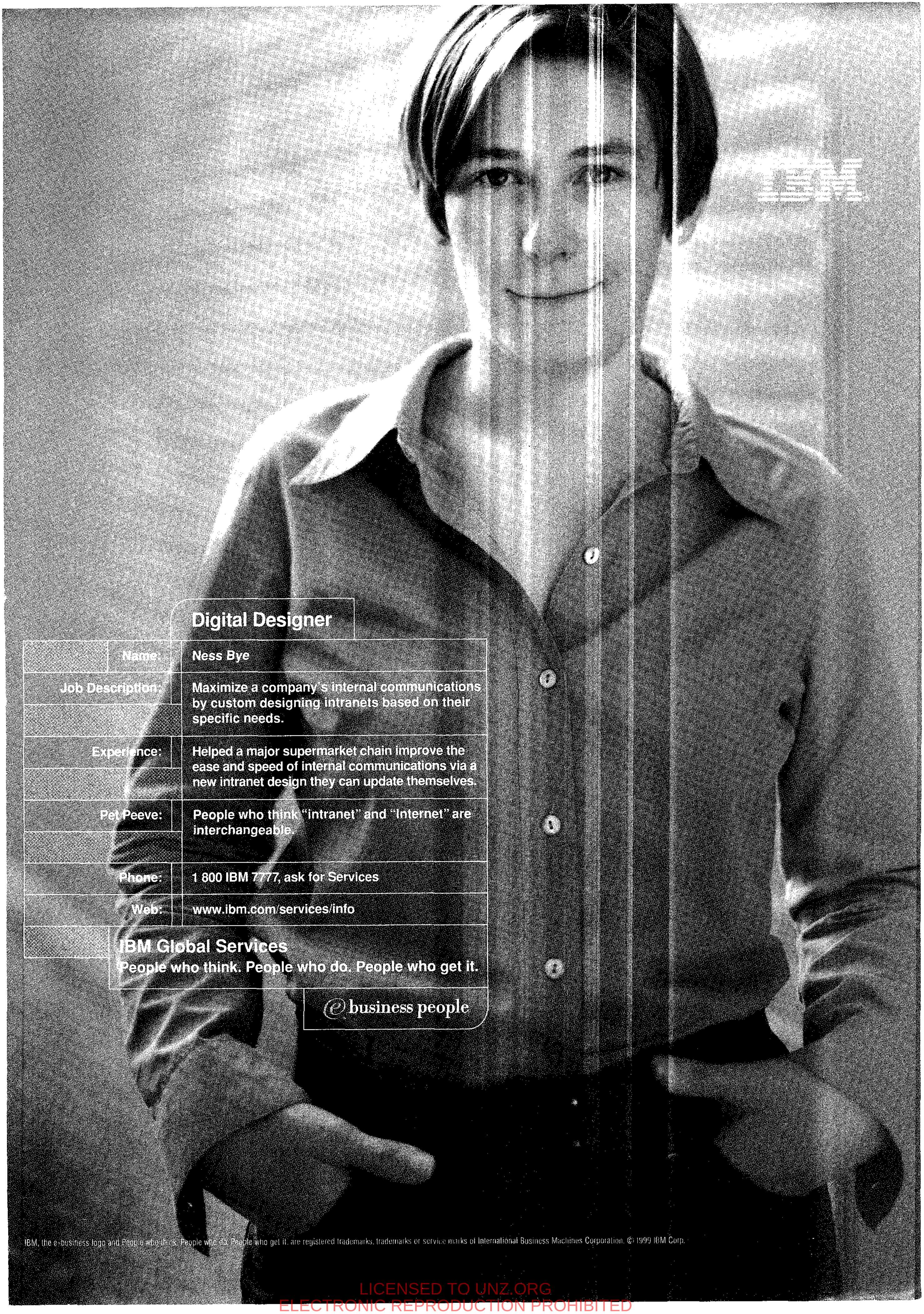

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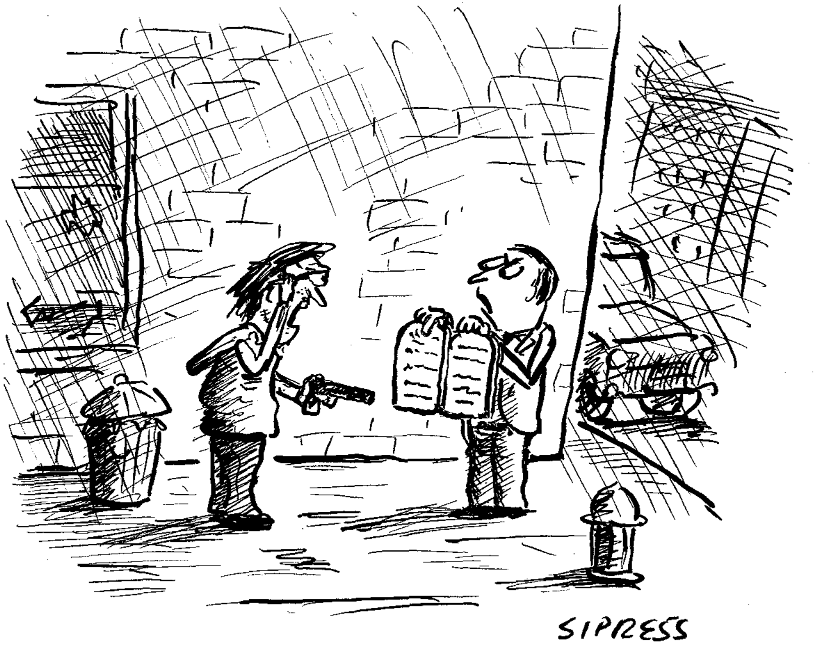

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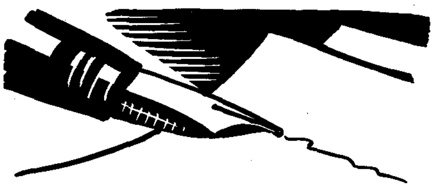

A NIL-NIL RESULT

With his article "The People's Game" (May 31st), Salman Rushdie joins the host of foreign soccer enthusiasts who have failed to incite American interest in the game. That a writer of his skill should not succeed underlines the futility of bridging this particular cultural chasm. Soccer may be "the people's game" but it's not *our* people's game. Soccer, which consists of endless expectations that are rarely gratified, is perfectly un-American. Basketball, a sport that offers constant gratification, is quintessentially American.

Ken Patton
New York City

I am a baseball fan, but I read Salman Rushdie's paean to soccer with relish. Did there ever beat the heart of a true fan that did not jump at the surrealistic, extrahuman play that results in a point being scored? It's a pity that a sport with forty-five minutes of uninterrupted play and no TV time-outs will never prosper in a land where the commercials are just as important as the Super Bowl.

Henry R. Allison, III
Bell Buckle, Tenn.

THE EAMES STYLE

Paul Goldberger's article on Charles and Ray Eames ("The Sky Line," May 24th) concluded that the Eameses aren't viewed by the current generation as the parents—or, at least, the grandparents—of modern multimedia because of their nineteenth-century manners and their broad range of interests. That's true, but, as someone who worked for the Eameses, I think there's another and perhaps more revealing explanation: the nature of the thinking behind their work.

For instance, their first barrage-of-images film, the 1959 "Glimpses of the U.S.A." exhibit in Russia, came about, Charles explained to me, because he was trying to portray the glories of America to propaganda-weary Russians too savvy to be fooled by the pristine Potemkin kitchen where Nixon wagged his finger at Khrushchev. So Charles and Ray drowned Soviet skepticism in images: so many, so fast, that it was psychologically impossible not to feel they were the real thing. Current use of such techniques isn't grounded in that sort of logic. It springs from the psychedelic legacy of the sixties—sensation for its own sake—or from a postmodern pleasure in ironic juxtapositions. Charles and Ray's work was never ironic. Irony demands a bittersweet acceptance of life's incongruities. For Charles and Ray, design was supposed to resolve those incongruities. The Eameses' mission was to give a unity and a coherence to experience by investing everything with grace and meaning. Having a style, in that broad sense, makes Charles and Ray's work alien to current designers who focus on the eccentric possibilities of their specialties.

Jon Boorstin
Los Angeles, Ca.

STEINBERG'S TRIPLE PLAY

I met Saul Steinberg in 1990, when I was a graduate student at New York University studying his art. He rarely smiled during our meeting, but he did do so when I mentioned the Yankees. It wasn't baseball, exactly, that struck him but an obituary of the Detroit Tigers' Johnny Neun that he had cut out of the newspaper two months earlier. He handed it to me and told me to read every word. "It's a beautiful thing," he said. The article was short, and concentrated mostly on an unassisted triple play that Neun had executed in 1927. An unassisted triple play is quick and graceful, spontaneous and observant. It is at once whimsical and real. It is a few seconds of genius—the same kind of genius that lasted Steinberg a lifetime.

Rachael Glick
Baltimore, Md.

•

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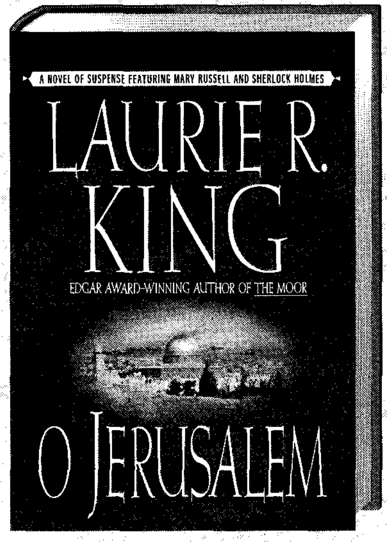
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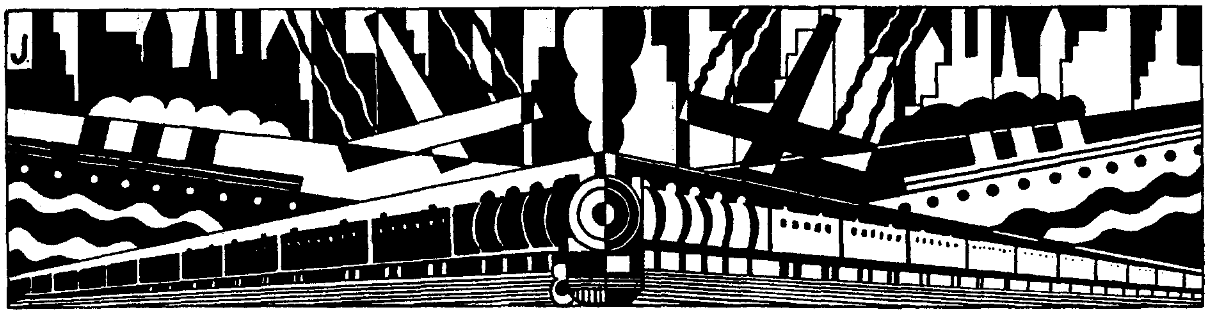

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

After the Fair—The York Theatre Company presents a musical based on the Thomas Hardy story "On the Western Circuit," with book and lyrics by Stephen Cole and music by Matthew Ward. In previews. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

Beauty Shop—A brief engagement of Shelley Garrett's musical comedy about the goings on at the Pamper Me Beauty Salon. July 6-9 at 8, July 10 at 5 and 9, and July 11 at 3 and 7:30. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 307-7171.)

Goodbye My Friduchita—Priscilla Lopez portrays the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, in a drama by Dolores C. Sendler. Previews begin July 6. (The Directors Company, 311 W. 43rd St. 712-7458.)

I'm the One That I Want—The comedian Margaret Cho tells the story of her disastrous descent into Hollywood, as the first Asian-American to have her own sitcom. In previews. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-4100.)

The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek—Two teens living in a country town during the Depression are at the center of this drama by Naomi Wallace. Opens June 30 at 8. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Amy's View—Dame Judi Dench is an amazing actress, but can she keep you in your seat for the duration of another one of David Hare's pompous plays? (Just barely.) This one claims to be about the tangled relationship between an actress from theatre's golden age and her modern daughter, who marries an arbiter of pop culture, but it's really about Hare's out-of-touch ideas regarding how today's audiences view theatre—meaning him. Directed by Richard Eyre. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

Angelique—A drama by first-time playwright Lorena Gale, about an African slave in Montreal in the seventeen-thirties. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes July 11.)

Annie Get Your Gun—A terrific revival of Irving Berlin's solid-gold score. It's played for romance and sass, which the vulnerable and charming Bernadette Peters and the hunky, easygoing Tom Wopat deliver in spades. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

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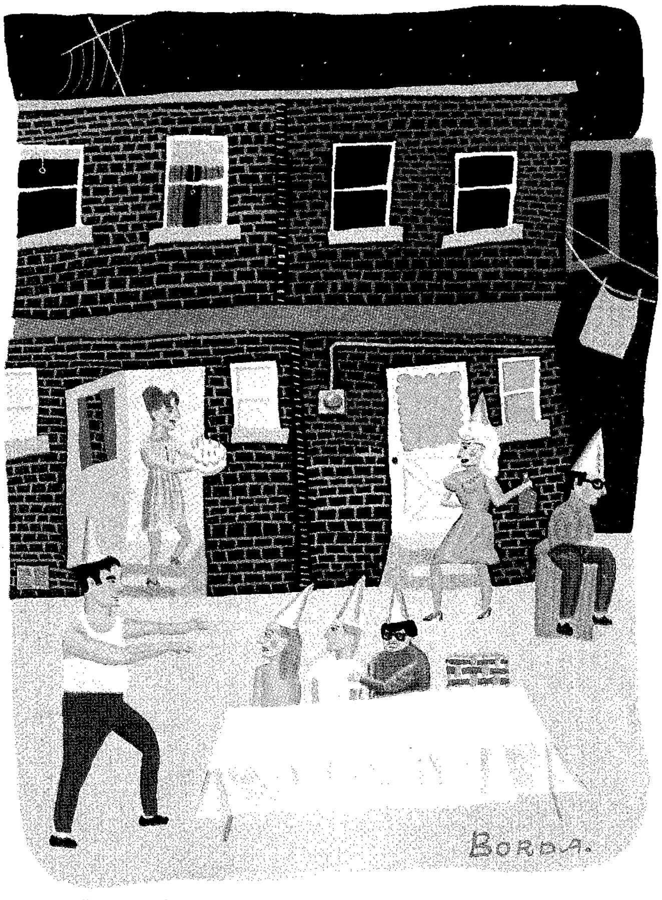
Bash—Calista Flockhart stars in a trio of one-acts by Neil LaBute examining the nature of evil. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Benten Kozo—Traditional Kabuki meets Jackie Chan in a delightful evening concocted by director Jim Simpson and his Bat Theatre Company. The work is based on Kawatake Mokuami's nineteenth-century play involving a princess, her missing fiancé, a master thief, and a priceless incense box; the company's hip updating of the script, along with Moe Schell's clever costumes, creates an ironic, funny, energetic production that (like many of the company's offerings in the past year) is well worth a trek to Tribeca. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 226-0051.)



"Gemini," by Albert Innaurato, at Second Stage.

JULIETTE BORDA

Chicago City Limits—The improv company presents its latest revue, "Unlimited." (Chicago City Limits Theatre, First Ave. at 61st St. 888-5233.)

Closer—Patrick Marber's slick dissection of the anatomy of desire follows four characters as they meet, mate, and move on in a kind of algebra of solitude which is factored out before our eyes. Marber can be very funny, and his writing is tight and well paced, but his staging is not. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/5/99.) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

A Couple of Blaguards—Michael T. Judd and Mickey Kelly perform Frank and Malachy McCourt's two-man autobiographical show. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Death of a Salesman—The casting of this production of Arthur Miller's masterpiece is generally uneven, but the show still packs a wallop. (3/8/99) (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

East Is East—This autobiographical first play by Ayub Khan-Din is set in a working-class English town in the seventies, in a family led by a bullheaded Pakistani father (Edward A. Hajj) and a more yielding English mother (Jenny Sterlin, in a vivid, vinegary performance). It is a lively and talky evening—there are six mostly grown, opinionated children in the family—and slightly too long. What is most memorable is Derek McLane's set, which features a chip shop so authentic you can smell food cooking, and a living room with the kind of shabby-perky décor which has become a signature of New Group productions. Directed by Scott Elliott. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes July 18.)

Fosse—This steamy revue of works by the choreographer Bob Fosse doesn't reveal anything new about the man behind the dances, but it does remind us why we won't be forgetting him anytime soon. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Gathering—Theodore Bikel stars in a new play by Arje Shaw, about three generations of a family living in New York during the Reagan years. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 239-6200.)

Gemini—Albert Innaurato's 1976 comedy, set at the birthday party of a sexually confused Harvard student. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422. Closes July 11.)

Hurrah at Last—The main character of Richard Greenberg's latest play is a whiny, money-obsessed novelist called Laurie (Peter Frechette), and he is clever (has Greenberg ever created a main character who is not?) without being compelling. It doesn't help matters that he has a bad cold all through the first act and is even sicker in the second act, most of which takes place while he's stuck in a hospital

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"The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek," by Naomi Wallace.

RODNEY ALAN GREENBLATT

bed. Laurie's fevered perceptions are rarely revelatory, and a remark he makes about being in the hospital describes all too well the over-all effect of the play itself: "There's this general feeling of profundity, but it never turns into anything specifically interesting." Directed by David Warren. A Roundabout staging. (6/14/99) (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 719-1300.)

The Iceman Cometh—Eugene O'Neill's despairing, four-and-a-half-hour drama about a barroom full of losers. This beautiful production is a rare opportunity to see a fully realized staging of a masterpiece by America's first great playwright. It has countless rewards, not the least of which is an outstanding ensemble cast that Kevin Spacey, in a brilliant turn as the crazily optimistic salesman Hickey, leads in a way that lights up all the other performances rather than overshadowing them. Howard Davies is the director. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

If Love Were All—Twiggy and Harry Groener star as Gertrude Lawrence and Noël Coward, in this appealing revue-cum-reminiscence by Sheridan Morley; the pair sing some twenty Coward songs and portray, with sweetness and without sentimentality, the remarkable lifelong friendship between the two, who met when Noël was twelve and Gertie fourteen. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

In Dahomey—Shirley Verrett stars in the 1903 musical by Will Marion Cook and Will Vodery, one of the first Broadway shows written and produced by black artists. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 353-1176.)

It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues—A marvellous collection of songs performed by a dynamic cast. The music alone could have showcased the influence of the blues, but instead the audience is subjected to explanatory notes and bad-talk-show banter. Fortunately, the blues triumphantly survives even this. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Macbeth—Free outdoor Shakespeare, from the Gorilla Rep, opening its tenth-anniversary season with performances at the Cloisters. (Fort Tryon Park. For information, call 330-8086.)

A Midsummer Night's Dream—Performances in city parks throughout the five boroughs, presented by the Shakespeare Project. (For information about dates and locations, call 946-1869.)

Peter Pan—The former Olympic gymnast Cathy Rigby stars in a limited engagement of the 1954 musical. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Small Craft Warning—David Greenspan leads the cast of the Worth Street Theatre's production of Tennessee Williams's 1972 drama. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St., at West Broadway. 604-4195.)

Snakebit—Two guys, a gal, and an AIDS test. With all the one-liners and dialogue cued by contemporary culture, this comedy-drama by the actor and first-time playwright David Marshall Grant, like a lot of new plays, seems like a sitcom rewritten for the stage (fewer jokes, more "issues"). The cast, though, is topnotch. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

The Taming of the Shrew—Allison Janney has the lead in Shakespeare's comedy, the New York Shakespeare Festival's first outdoor production of the season. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 539-8750. Closes July 11.)

La Terrasse—An agonizingly airless comedy by Jean-Claude Carrière (the translation is by Mark O'Donnell). A couple is splitting up and is vacating their Paris apartment; before they depart, a real-estate agent shows the place to several prospective tenants, and, oh, what noncomedic high jinks ensue! Mike Ockrent's direction is like *mélasse en janvier*. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes July 18.)

Things You Shouldn't Say Past Midnight—Peter Ackerman's screwball bedroom comedy consists mainly of a sublimely ridiculous conference call involving three pairs of lovers. The questions about sex and the proper balance between intellectual and physical attraction have no answers, but Ackerman has some interesting suggestions, and, to his credit, comedy outweighs the theorizing. John Rando, the director, has a good eye, and the evening comes off beautifully. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

This Lime Tree Bower—A delightful tale (by Conor McPherson, who also wrote "The Weir") of three young Irishmen, each of whom goes off the rails in various ways but, with a little help from the other two, is able to put his life back together again. Neatly told as a series of overlapping monologues, the evening is funny and sharply observed, and sweet without being sentimental. A perfect antithesis to this season's blockbusters. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes July 18.)

Thwak—Comic acrobatics (both physical and vocal) from the Australian performers David Collins and Shane Dundas, a.k.a. the Umbilical Brothers. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

Twelfth Night—The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival's season opener. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. For ticket information and directions, call 914-265-9575.)

The Weir—Conor McPherson's play takes place in the musty chill of a backwater Irish pub, where a handful of habitués chew the cud of their solitude, spinning ghostly yarns that fill the air with glimmers of fear and resignation. It has a bittersweet charm, but for all the well-crafted talk and the well-observed bonhomie, it is finally a shaggy-bog story. (4/12/99) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Wonderland—A comedy-drama by Julia Dahl, set in Sag Harbor, about a group of politically minded members of Generation X. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ART: Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FOOTLOOSE:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE MYSTERY OF IRMA VEP:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SIDE MAN:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE:** HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **WIT:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

Kirov Ballet—The two-hundred-and-seventeen-year-old company from St. Petersburg's Maryinsky Theatre presents four programs during its two-week stay, including this week's "Sleeping Beauty," a re-creation of Petipa's 1890 original, and a "Giselle" based on the company's 1848 version. (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000. June 28-29, July 1-2, and July 5-6 at 8 and June 30 and July 3 at 2 and 8. Through July 10.)

Zvi Gotheiner & Dancers—The kibbutz-born choreographer presents the première of "Checkpoint," which borrows the rituals of border crossings to examine ethnic heritage, as well as "Dust" and "Duets to Brazilian-Indian Music." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. June 29-July 2 at 8.)

Rosa Mei Dance—The five-year-old company celebrates the landmark with a sort of Independence Day trilogy ("Red Rum," "White Noise," and "Blue Horses"). The martial-arts-inspired choreographer also offers "False Eyelashes," "Two Stellas," and "The Adventures of Stupid Girl." (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 924-0077. July 1-2 at 9 and July 3 at 8. Through July 17.)

OUT OF TOWN

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival—June 29-July 1 at 8, July 2 at 8:30, July 3 at 2 and 8:30, and July 4 at 2: Paul Taylor Dance Company. . . . ¶July 1-2 at 8:15 and July 3-4 at 5: Pepatián. (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 413-243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Eric Clapton and Friends—Bob Dylan, Mary J. Blige, Sheryl Crow, and D'Angelo join Old Slowhand for an evening of guitar-hero lullabies. A benefit concert. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. June 30 at 7:30.)

Ann and Nancy Wilson—The singing sisters, formerly of Heart, return to give their neo-Zeppelin rock an acoustic-flavored makeover. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. June 30 at 8.)

Midsummer Night Swing—Dancing under the stars at Lincoln Center. June 30: The Gerard Carelli Orchestra and Bob Rotunda's Stardusters Big Band. . . . ¶ July 1: The Duke Robillard Band. . . . ¶ July 2: Linda Clifford and Carol Douglas lead a night of the Hustle. . . . ¶ July 3 at 8:15: Hemingway saw **orquesta aragón** play at the Tropicana during the nineteen-fifties, in Batista's Havana. Like some miraculously preserved V-8 wonder from the era of rum cocktails, cigars, and hard-swinging cha-cha-cha, this celebrated and beloved *charanga* band keeps on cruising. . . . ¶ July 4: D.j. Felix Hernandez, of WBGO, presents his Rhythm Revue. . . . ¶ July 6: Tommy Mara, with Joe Battaglia and the New York Swing Band. (Dance lessons are given each evening at 6:30; performances start at 8:15. For more information, call 875-5766.)

Central Park SummerStage—Live music in New York City's back yard. July 1 at 7:30: **"joni's jazz."** With an ego as big as Malibu Beach and a tiresome persecution complex, Joni Mitchell makes it tough to love her these days. Her work speaks for itself, though, particularly the sixties and seventies albums that cut a glorious swath, from confessional folk to sleek pop to jazz-inflected art songs. Mitchell went fully electric much later than Dylan, taking the plunge with "Court and Spark" in 1974. The albums that followed, including "The Hissing of Summer Lawns," "Hejira" (featuring brilliant work from bassist Jaco Pastorius), "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter," and "Mingus," each with a deeply personal poetic voice and a broadening of musical boundaries, have turned out to be some of her most influential. For this benefit concert, a dizzying range of artists—from Duncan Shiek, PM Dawn, Chaka Khan, Jane Siberry, and Holly Cole to Ravi Coltrane, Eric Anderson, Joe Jackson, Annie Ross, Jon Hendricks, and Vernon Reid—revisit these prescient albums. . . . ¶ July 4 at 3: Now a trio (following the recent departure of keyboardist Vivian Trimble), **luscious jackson,** the band named after an obscure Philadelphia 76ers basketball player, tries to recapture the minor glory of its 1996 album, "Fever In Fever Out," which produced the hit single "Naked Eye." On the new "Electric Honey," bassist Jill Cunniff, guitarist Gabrielle Glaser, and former Beastie Boys drummer Kate Schellenbach get a little help with guest appearances from Deborah Harry and Emmylou Harris. With the Elvis-on-acid sounds of **jon spencer blues explosion** and Beastie Boys d.j. **mix master mike.** (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 360-2777.)

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers / Lucinda Williams—Although his almost effortlessly excellent new album, "Echo," hasn't exactly galvanized the masses, Petty and his longtime lieutenants remain undeterred as they embark on yet another tour to show the whippersnappers how it's done. / Williams, a forty-five-year-old unfashionable, unglamorous songwriter from Baton Rouge, is the spiritual daughter of Robert Johnson and Howlin' Wolf. She's still touring in support of her fine album "Car Wheels on a Gravel Road." (Jones Beach. 516-221-1000. July 2-3 at 8.)

Dr. John / Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes—A free concert by the gruff-throated New Orleans pianist and the occasional Bruce Springsteen crony. (Battery Park. No tickets necessary. July 4 at 3:30.)

Cher—Thanks to the tacky, if unbelievably irresistible, disco smash "Believe," Cher now enjoys full-metal diva status again. Her recent VH-1 appearance signalled her return to the rarefied world inhabited by such de-luxe divas as Tina Turner and Elton John. With the eighties relic Cyndi Lauper. (Jones Beach. July 5-6 at 7:30.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Arlene Grocery, 95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (358-1633)—A narrow, dimly lit renovated bodega that's the ideal environment for three to five unknown bands a night struggling their way out of obscurity.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—July 1-2: Seventy-year-old **june carter cash,** one of the daughters of country music's first family, has just released "Press On," only her second solo album in a career that began in the Depression. Packed with classic country songs, including "Ring of Fire" (which she co-wrote with her husband, Johnny, in 1963), it is an austere collection deeply rooted in the front porches of Appalachia but leavened with a good dose of humor, evident in a song about Quentin Tarantino. She's put together a new band that includes her son John Carter Cash, and these live shows are certain to be a grand ole time.

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—June 30-July 1: Local swamp-rockers **the bogmen.**

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—July 1: The sharp, scratchy guitar of veteran **hubert sumlin,** who played in Howlin' Wolf's band for twenty years.

Connolly's, 14 E. 47th St. (867-3767)—Home on Saturday nights to the rollicking **black 47,** led by the tradition-rattling Celtic-music gadfly Larry Kirwan.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—July 4: Thirteen years ago in Oxford, England, singer Amelia Fletcher and her brother Matthew, who played drums, formed a short-lived band called Talulah Gosh and turned out some incredible pop confections. A few years later the pair created the quintet Heavenly, which delivered more of the same sweets. It all came to an abrupt halt, however, in 1996, when Matthew committed suicide. **marine research,** which consists of the players from Heavenly plus a new drummer, represents Amelia Fletcher's return to the world of smart bubble-gum pop. To judge from its forthcoming album, "Sounds from the Gulf Stream," she hasn't lost any of her shine. The **mingus big band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

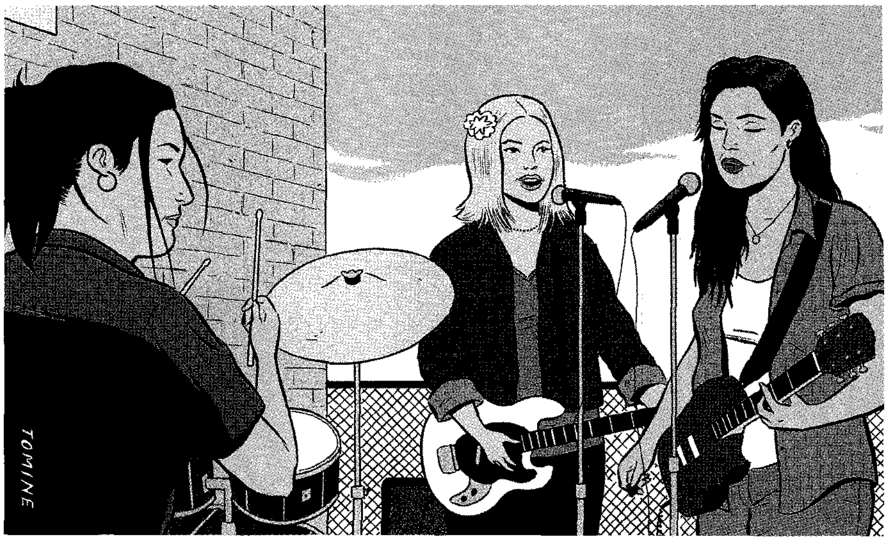
Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—June 30: Former Clash guitarist and vocalist **joe strummer** has banged together a new band, the Mescaleros, and they've been touring around the U.K. for the past few months. Advance word reports a tight show of new material (his upcoming single "Yalla Yalla" shows that his voice is still in good shape and that he's keeping his beats up to date) laced with Clash hits. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—June 30: The Brazilian guitarist **vinicius cantuária** has lived in New York City for the past five years, and rubbing elbows with such local musicians as Bill Frisell, Arto Lindsay, and Laurie Anderson (all of whom contribute to his latest album, "Tucumã") has helped stretch bossa nova to include sampling and other technological tricks. Not that Cantuária needs much creative help; he's written hit songs for Caetano Veloso, Gal Costa, and other Brazilian superstars. The result is a sophisticated and poignant sound, full of both the excitement of being an expatriate and an intense longing for his homeland. He's joined by trumpeter **michael leonhart** and percussionist **paulo braga.** July 1: Cure alums **lol tolhurst** and **andy anderson** break out their new band, Levinhurst, in an evening of reminiscence and new music. July 2: The Japanese quartet **melt banana** specializes in hard-core noise, and the title of its new release (on John Zorn's Tzadik label), "MxBx 1998/13,000 Miles at Light Velocity," nicely captures its high-speed style.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—June 30: Even in a world made safe for pop punk by the likes of Green Day and the Offspring, **face to face** isn't likely to quit mixing the raw energy of screaming guitars and thumping drums with the sweetness of catchy hooks anytime soon. They've been at it for the better part of a decade, and their upcoming release, "Ignorance Is Bliss," lives up to its title.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—July 1: **face to face** (see Maxwell's).

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—June 30: **sun ra arkestra.** The maestro has returned to Saturn, but his band plays on. The unexpected is still to be expected. July 1: **basement bhangra,** an evening of ecstatic, futuristic dance music which fuses an ancient Punjabi harvest festival with the technological wonders of underground London. The d.j.s Rekkha and Joy spice the infectious dohl drumbeat with



Luscious Jackson, at Central Park SummerStage.

ADRIAN TOMINE

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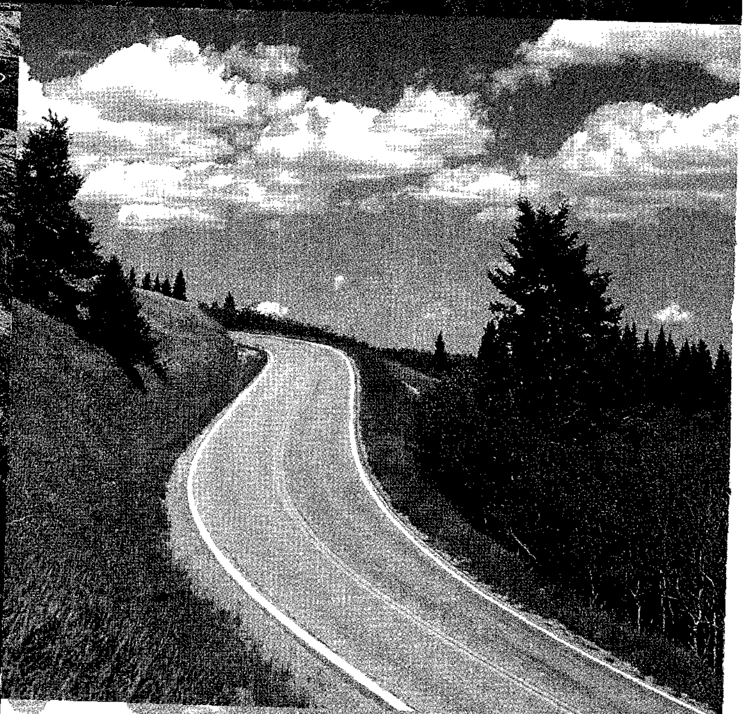

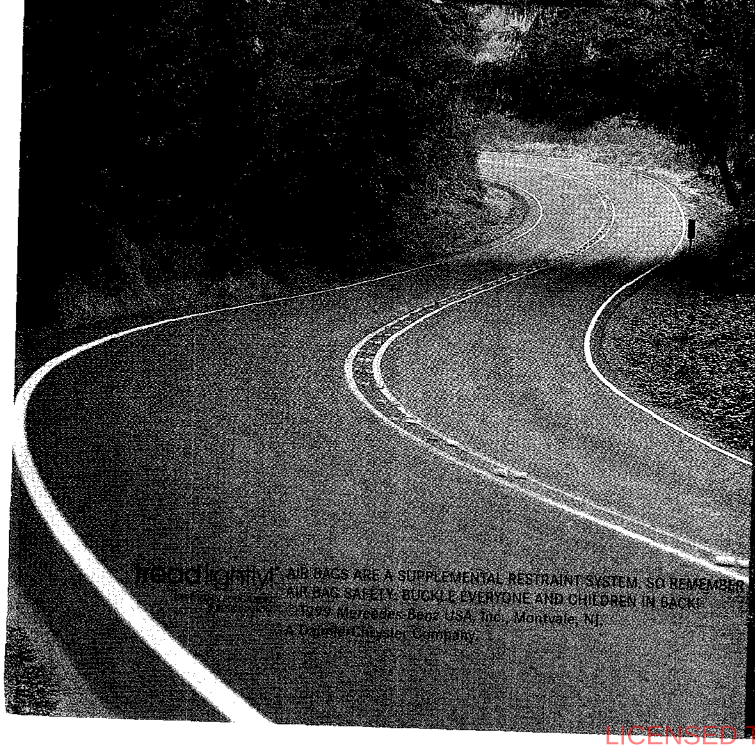

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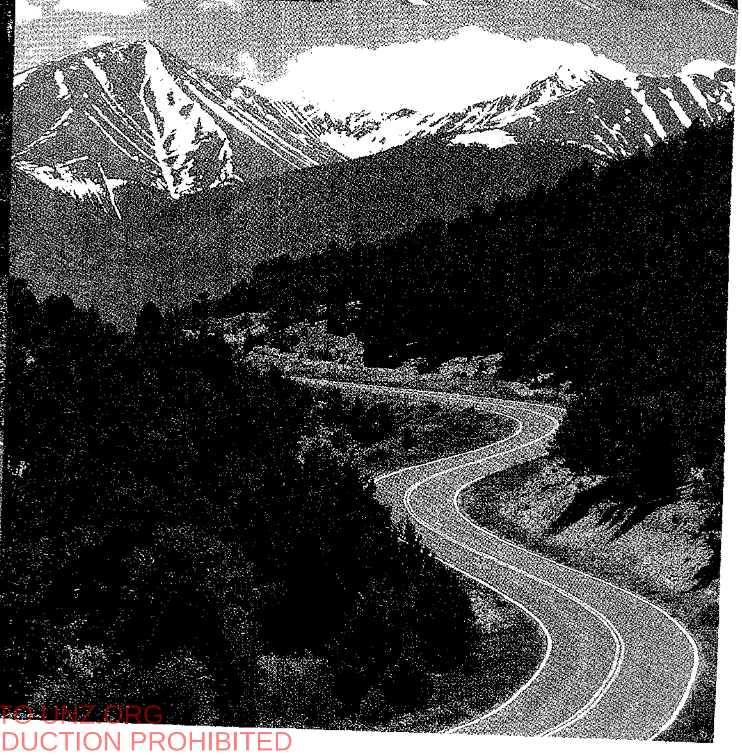

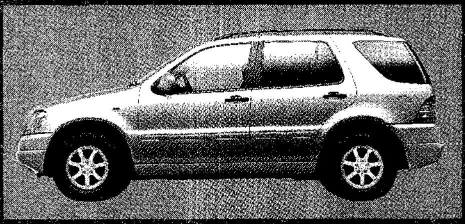

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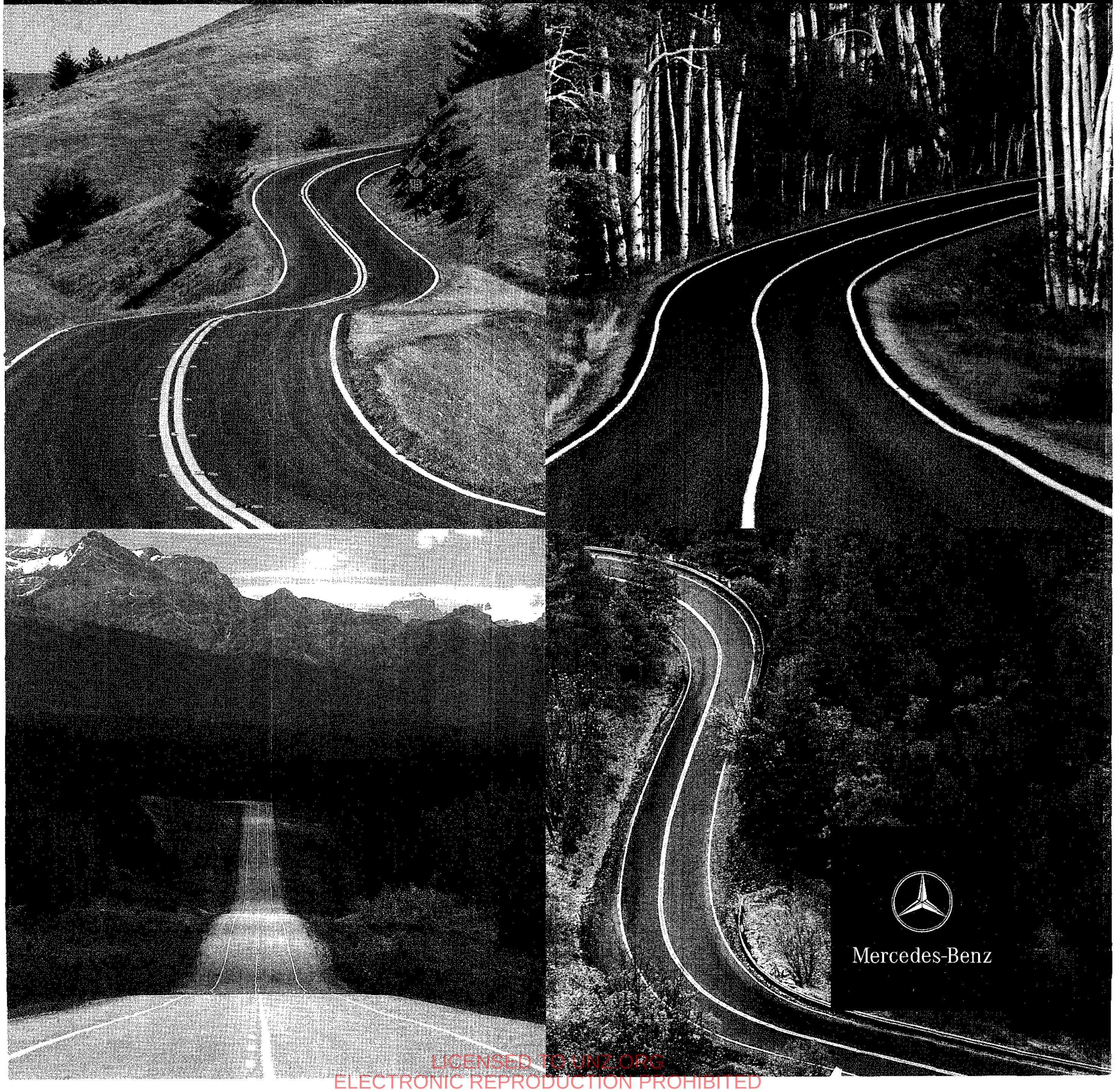


Mercedes-Benz

pinches of classical raga, old-school hip-hop, dub reggae, and the occasional Malcolm X outburst or car crash. The frenetic but friendly dance floor is awhirl with turbans and saris, and Indian film clips are projected as a backdrop. This monthly party makes your average world-music event seem as bland as Esperanto.

Tonic, 107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—June 30: **ARTO LINDSAY'S** motto is simple: Have detuned guitar, will deconstruct. His recent disk "Noon Chill" has a lot of good atmospheric picking and some noise, but it's distinguished by its coolly romantic songwriting.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—July 1: A night of high-grade hip-hop with Wu-Tang Clan veteran **GHOSTFACE KILLAH** and the **SPORTY THIEVZ.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **SUSANNAH MC CORKLE** is currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room. One of the divas of the cabaret/jazz scene, McCorkle has a fluid repertoire that ranges from master craftsmen like Porter and Mercer to the Brazilian tunesmiths Jobim and Bonfa. Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—July 1-3: **KEVIN EUBANKS,** guitarist for "The Tonight Show," leads his trio. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through July 4: The French soundtrack king **MICHEL LEGRAND** may not be the first person who comes to mind when the word "jazz" is mentioned, but anyone who was able to entice Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Bill Evans to join him on an album, 1958's "Legrand Jazz," has his credentials firmly intact. The man behind the music of "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" and "The Summer of '42" will have a killer rhythm section in bassist **RON CARTER** and drummer **GRADY TATE** to support his pleasant piano work. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through July 4: The **DEWEY REDMAN** quartet. An integral member of Ornette Coleman's and Keith Jarrett's bands before striking out on his own, tenor saxophonist Redman was fusing earth-toned blues, free-jazz excursions, and reverential bop and ballads long before his celebrated son Joshua even knew which end of the sax you blew into. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through July 3: Jazz doesn't want for master pianists, but there's only one **TOMMY FLANAGAN.** Tone, touch, taste, technique—he's got it all. With Flanagan's imaginative repertoire and the almost alarming unity of his trio, it doesn't get any better. Dining.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night. Stocked to the gills with exciting players, the **JASON LINDNER BIG BAND** holds court every Monday.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through July 4: The **WINARD HARPER** sextet. Harper was the drum-playing sibling in the Harper Brothers, one of the first neo-traditional jazz bands to gain attention. Now a veteran, he's sure to have some eager young players on the bandstand looking for wisdom and direction.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through July 11: The redoubtable pianist **KENNY BARRON** is usually flanked by two old friends, bassist Buster Williams and drummer **BEN RILEY.** The impeccable Riley is on board here, but Williams will be replaced by **KIYOSHI KITAGAWA,** a move that may positively shake up the smoothness that comes with overfamiliarity. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Zinc Bar, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—A young guitarist with flying fingers and a heart filled with bebop, **RON AFFIF** has a semi-regular Monday gig at an intimate space that caters to guitar freaks—just right for a six-string whiz with almost too much to say. Saturdays feature Brazilian jazz.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

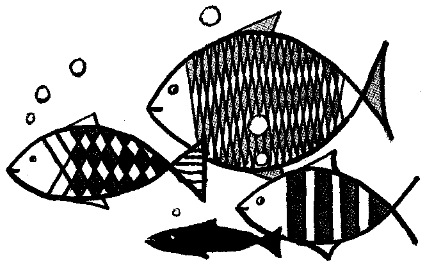
Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream." Along with Odilon Redon, Moreau (1826-98) was a favorite artist of Des Esseintes, the prototypical decadent antihero of Joris Karl Huysmans's novel "Against Nature." Both artists are loosely confined within the context of symbolism, an aesthetic sensibility more than a movement, characterized as much by avant-gardism as by more traditional artistic impulses. Most of the paintings and drawings in this exhibition come from the Musée Gustave Moreau, in Paris, the artist's former residence; it remains the ideal environment in which to experience his sensorially rich, often weird and violent pictures. Nevertheless, this show offers ample opportunity to reconsider Moreau. Uninspired by the innovations of Courbet's realism and the succeeding generation of Impressionists, Moreau also disdained academic style; instead, he forged a singular style, drawing inspiration from Italian Renaissance, medieval, Japanese, Mughal, and other sources. Curiously, Moreau's works—with their combination of drawing and painting, tenebrous chiaroscuro and jewellike color—look fresher now than many Impressionist canvases, which, through the sheer number of shows devoted to them, are beginning to seem like so much visual white noise. Through Aug. 22. . . . ¶ "Prayerbook for a Queen: The Hours of Jeanne D'Evreux." Removed from their binding for the production of a lavish facsimile, approximately three dozen illustrated pages by one of the masters of medieval illumination, Jean Pucelle (active 1320-1334), are on view. The Met has thoughtfully provided magnifying glasses and a shelf to lean on while viewing these intricate, ID-card-size pages. The real treats are not Pucelle's religious scenes, skillfully cribbed from Italian models, but his more idiosyncratic marginalia. Slithering out from between lines of text are all kinds of mischievous miniature creatures: a monkey doing a handstand, a bearded old man pulling a rake across the page, and, most startlingly, a smooching couple emerging from the words "Sanctus Sanctus." Through Aug. 29. . . . ¶ In an adjacent gallery, a related show called "Devotions and Diversions" gathers some of the finest northern-European books from the dawn of printmaking. Through Aug. 29. . . . ¶ "Cézanne to van Gogh: The Collection of Dr. Gachet." More than fifty works (by Monet, Pissarro, Guillaumin, Sisley, Renoir, and, above all, Cézanne and van Gogh) owned by van Gogh's doctor have travelled across the Atlantic for the first time. Through Aug. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Collecting in Depth: Drawings by Grosz, Schwitters, Ernst, and Klee." In a nod to the barrage of drawing shows currently on view around Manhattan, MOMA's staff has put together an exhibition that casually proves who's top dog when it comes to twentieth-century works on paper. Each of the four artists represented gets a room to himself, and each room is crowded with delights and oddities. Schwitters, represented by almost forty works, including a handful of his finest abstract collages, steals the spotlight, but even Max Ernst, the Surrealist ideologue who should be the show's weak link, turns in a memorably lovely trifle, made from advertisements for panama hats. Through July 20. . . . ¶ "The Un-Private House" presents twenty-six houses (via designs, maquettes, digitally enhanced photographs, and interactive computer displays) that update the idea of the four (very un-) solid

BOOK CURRENTS

The Deep

You don't have to be Jacques Cousteau to find yourself eye to eye with a sea horse. Hundreds of photographs in **Encyclopedia of Fishes** (Academic) depict the habits and habitats of more kinds of fish than anyone is likely to see in a lifetime, from the endearingly gaudy parrot fish to the nightmarish dragonfish (which sports a bear-trap jaw mounted on a whiplash body). In **The Underwater Explorer** (Lyons), the mother-and-daughter team of Annemarie and Danja Köhler take you on their tour of coral reefs and confide charmingly that "Holding hands with an octopus can be a thrilling experience," though the photograph of Danja embracing Max, a giant moray eel, may be a little too thrilling for most.



Marine zoologist Martin Wells has spent his career studying octopuses and the rest of the cephalopod class (or "jet set," as he calls them, in reference to their distinctive means of propulsion). His accessible book of essays, **Civilization and the Limpet** (Perseus), describes the excitement of handling one of the oldest species, the nautilus, thought to be three or four hundred million years old and long coveted for the beauty of its spiral shell. The body inside was first depicted in the beautiful drawings in the seventeenth-century Dutch naturalist Georgius Rumphius's vast shellfish tome, **The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet,** which Yale University Press has just published for the first time in English, translated and edited by E. M. Beekman.

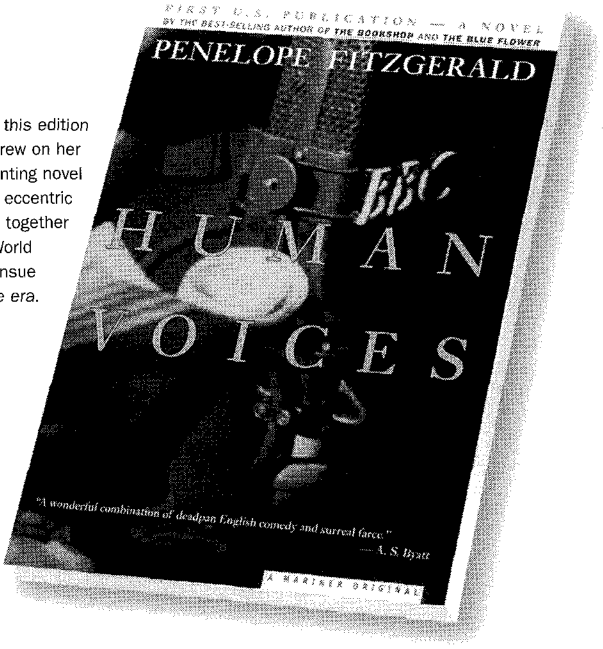
The largest of the cephalopods, the *Architeuthis*, is, tantalizingly, also the least well known. Richard Ellis's **The Search for the Giant Squid** (Lyons) explores the many myths and comparatively few facts surrounding this awesome creature. Though specimens have washed ashore that measure as long as fifty-five feet, and though there is proof that the monster frequently does battle with sperm whales, it has never been seen in its natural environment, thousands of feet down in the Atlantic. If you happen to catch sight of a nineteen-foot tentacle or an eye the size of a dinner plate, it's advisable to head back to shore.

CHRIS CURRY

Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

Penelope Fitzgerald: An Accent on Award-Winning Fiction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BY THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF THE BOOKSHOP AND THE BLUE FLOWER
PENELOPE FITZGERALD
BBC
HUMAN VOICES
"A wonderful combination of deadpan English comedy and surreal farce."
— A. S. Byatt
A MARINER ORIGINAL

HUMAN VOICES

The first U.S. publication of *Human Voices*, this edition marks a true literary landmark. Fitzgerald drew on her own wartime experience to craft this enchanting novel that chronicles the follies and foibles of an eccentric crew of BBC broadcasters. They are thrown together in a mixed-sex dormitory during London's World War II air raids and the relationships that ensue evoke the romance and tragedy of a bygone era. (Houghton Mifflin/Mariner)

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Discount **10%**
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OFFSHORE

Deemed "flawless" by the judges, Fitzgerald's Booker Prize-winning novel delves into the diverse, slightly disreputable lives of houseboat dwellers on England's Thames River. (Houghton Mifflin/Mariner)

Pub. Price: $11.00
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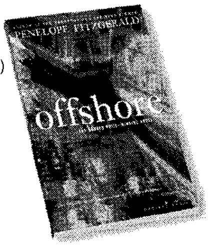
PENELOPE FITZGERALD
offshore

THE BOOKSHOP

The widow Florence Green musters all her energy to open a bookstore in Hardborough, East Anglia, only to encounter resistance, jealousy and perhaps even a couple of ghosts in the small seaside town. (Houghton Mifflin/Mariner)

Pub. Price: $10.00
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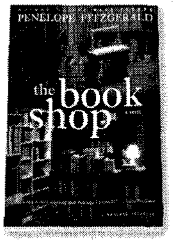
PENELOPE FITZGERALD
the book shop

THE BLUE FLOWER

The shocking betrothal of impetuous Fritz to twelve-year-old Sophie seals the fate of the German student who would later gain fame as the Romantic poet Novalis. 1998 National Book Critics Circle Award winner. (Houghton Mifflin/Mariner)

Pub. Price: $12.00
Discount **10%**
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PENELOPE FITZGERALD
the blue flower

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Prices effective at store locations through 7/14/99 walls of home. Opens July 1. . . . ¶ "Alfred Hitchcock: Behind the Silhouette." Through Aug. 17. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Surrealism: Two Private Eyes." A vast exhibition composed of work from the separate collections of publisher Daniel Filipacchi and the late Nesuhi Ertegun, who, as a partner with his brother Ahmet, owned Atlantic Records. The show is rich in terrific works, including such iconic Surrealist masterpieces as René Magritte's "The Rape" (1934), Salvador Dali's "The Phenomenon of Ecstasy" (1933), and Giorgio de Chirico's "The Disquieting Muses" (1925), and two astonishing rooms—one devoted to Cornell boxes, the other to Surrealist bookbinding. There is a lot of marvellous or, at the very least, curious work by lesser-known artists; on the other hand, there is a lot of dreck, both by unknown figures and by famous ones having a bad art day. With its idiosyncratic view of the Surrealist movement, this somewhat cumbersome show nevertheless infuses the typically slow summer season with a jolt of energy. Through Sept. 12. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—"The American Century: Art & Culture 1900-2000 (Part I: 1900-50)" is exactly what its unimaginative title implies—a grand, bland survey, full of familiar milestones but remarkably short on fresh connections or surprises. There's plenty to see, however: the six-hundred-odd works include architectural models, furniture, ceramics, magazine covers, and kitchen appliances, as well as canonical paintings and photographs. The opening and closing sections are the weakest, no doubt because of the show's arbitrary cutoff points. Eakins appears, but not Homer. Sargent is represented by only a mediocre sketch. Pollock, de Kooning, and company likewise get short shrift. The show's highlights are the Jazz Age and the Depression, with marvellous images from Hopper, O'Keeffe, Gerald Murphy, the Soyer brothers, and Ben Shahn, but here, too, there are strange omissions. Why Philip Evergood, for example, but not Jack Levine? Film clips playing throughout (of Charlie Chaplin, Duke Ellington, et al.) heighten the period flavor, but they're also inescapable and cloying, like Muzak. Ideally, the museum's educational mission should dovetail with its aesthetic one; here, the history lesson takes over, making for a dutiful, stolid, rainy-day resource. Through Aug. 22; Part II opens Sept. 26. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The museum has opened its new and elaborate Gottesman Hall of Planet Earth, with rock formations, ice-core samples, earthquake and volcanic-events tickers, and other geologic displays. . . . ¶ "Epidemic! The World of Infectious Disease." Through Sept. 6. . . . ¶ "The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition." Through Oct. 11. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Winslow Homer: Illustrating America" offers more than a hundred wood engravings, including many made when the artist was covering the Civil War. Opens July 2. . . . ¶ "Impressionists in Winter: Effets de Neige." Through Aug. 29. . . . ¶ "Mariko Mori: Empty Dream" offers computer-generated photographs and installations by the Japanese artist. Through Aug. 15. (Open Tuesdays for the Impressionist show only, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 10 to 5; Thursdays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (217-5800)—"Papiers à la Mode: Illusions of Fashion" presents twenty-five hand-painted paper dresses—including a "gold and silk" 1745 Venetian court dress and a "satin and velvet" Victorian evening gown—whose elaborate trompe-l'oeil effects were created by Isabelle de Borchgrave and Rita Brown. Through Aug. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. (288-0700)—The Medieval Housebook, belonging to the German house of Waldburg Wolfegg, is a strange collection of military, metallurgical, and astrological texts in four languages, probably dating from the late fifteenth century. The identities of its illustrators remain a mystery, but whoever they were, they were fantastic: the panoramic renderings of military encampments, mining works, and courtly gardens are captivating, with plenty of tenderly observed and frequently bawdy details. Through July 25. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Grolier Club, 47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—"Stamped with a National Character: Nineteenth-Century American Color Plate Books." This splendid exhibition, curated by William S. Reese, is rife with bibliophilic treasures. The show opens with English emigré William Birch's hand-colored copperplate engravings for "The City of Philadelphia . . . As It Appeared in the Year 1800" (published in that year) and closes with Frederick M. Sheldon's "The Practical Colorist" (1900), which includes some gorgeously overblown pink roses printed in trichromatic halftones. For the intervening years, the show takes up such themes as nature studies, the Native American, the Audubons, science, exotica, and fashion. In our era of digital superfluities cropping up in all media, these meticulously produced color plates are less the relics of antiquarian bookshops than they are technical marvels of precision and vivacity. Through July 31. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. (685-0008)—"New York Collects: Drawings and Watercolors 1900-1950" culls works from seventy-five New York private collections to assemble a lively overview of modernist draftsmanship, starting with a trio of late Cézanne watercolors and concluding with a large, elegant Pollock painted on rice paper. In between, there are outstanding works by Matisse, Picasso, Beckmann, Gris, and Gorky. Through Aug. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5; Fridays, 10:30 to 8; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Queens Museum of Art, Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—"Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin," an ambitious if misguided survey of Conceptual art across the world. The show's basic thesis holds that Conceptualism developed in the sixties as several independent movements in different locales, in contrast to its generally accepted history, which emphasizes a core group of mainly American artists—Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Sol LeWitt, Hans Haacke, and others—and certain important European satellites. The premise is fine as a means of bringing to light hitherto neglected works, but the studious avoidance of the traditional history and figures becomes annoying. The whole of North America is confined to a rather small gallery, while two galleries are given over to Latin America (which do include important works by Lygia Clark and Oscar Bony). The result is a twofold disappointment: the cognoscenti will complain about omissions and bad selections, while the average museumgoer is treated to an account of Conceptualism which in its attempt to be inclusive is instead misleadingly selective. Through Aug. 29. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

WALTER MINUS

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Many galleries are closed for the entire Fourth of July weekend; it is advisable to call ahead.)

Odd Nerdrum—Grandiose self-portraits, in which this Norwegian artist's considerable painterly talents service his colossal narcissism. The centerpiece, "Self-Portrait as the Prophet of Painting," shows Nerdrum in a full-length golden robe bedecked with pearls, carrying a palette and brush, against a dusky northern horizon. It's pure opera buffa. In another canvas, he lifts the same robe up to his chest to expose his stately belly and prodigiously curved erection—all the while giving the viewer a pained, sombre expression. If this show had a soundtrack, it would be "You're So Vain," sung in a gravelly Nordic basso. Through July 30. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

May Stevens—A show of lithographs and acrylic drawings, scheduled to coincide with a larger exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston. Though Stevens is best known for her earnest paintings of feminist subjects, notably a series that paired her mother and Rosa Luxemburg, these images are calmly decorative and picturesque. Part of a series called "Sea of Words," they feature rowboats afloat on waves of iridescent scribbling. The sources of the texts include Virginia Woolf and Julie Kristeva, but most are deliberately illegible. Through Aug. 25. (Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669.)

"Spots"—A juried show of top "spot art," the insider term for magazine and newspaper illustrations, features as-is originals by established masters and new talent. Contributors include David Levine, Steve Brodner, Melinda Beck, R. O. Blechman, Al Hirschfeld, and Ben Katchor. Through July 31. (Society of Illustrators, 128 E. 63rd St. 838-2560.)

Short List—**JOSÉ BEDIA,** Galeria Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 644-9090. Through July 17. . . . **JOSEPH BEUYS,** Werner, 21 E. 67th St. 988-1623. Open Mondays; through July 9. . . . **MICHAEL BRENNAN,** Yoshii, 20 W. 57th St. 265-8876. Through July 31. . . . **HERBERT BROWN,** Gat, 1100 Madison Ave., at 82nd St. 327-0441. Through Sept 30. . . . **CHARLES HENRI FORD,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444. Through July 16. . . . **ADRIANE HERMAN,** Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. 861-7338. Through July 30. . . . **JASPER JOHNS,** Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St. 489-3331. Through July 31. . . . **LIZA LOU,** Vanderbilt Hall, Grand Central Terminal. Through July 26. . . . **JAN MATULKA,** York, 21 E. 65th St. 772-9155. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays; through July 30.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Saint Clair Cemin—Sculptures in marble and bronze, on pedestals that are part of the action. Cemin's quizzical, hard-to-read attitude toward his subject matter—a figure of the Sphinx, for example, has a deliberately pitted surface rather than one that has seemingly suffered the effects of age—makes this show more Sphinx-like than it needed to be. Through July 30. (Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727.)

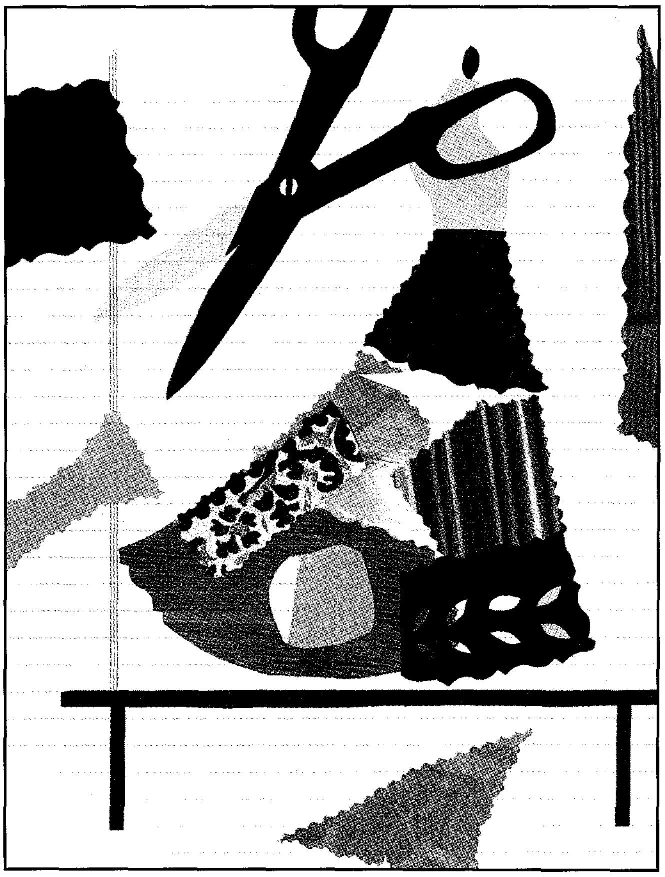
"Kill All Lies"—The title of this excellent show, curated by Michelle Maccarone, is somewhat opaque, but its punk-rock sound serves the various art works well. The centerpiece is Dara Birnbaum's "Kiss the Girls, Make Them Cry" (1979), a sardonic video installation appropriating segments from the original "Hollywood Squares" game show. Two walls are given over to Henry Flynt's fifty-seven color photographs, taken in the late seventies, of the original Samo© graffiti of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Al Diaz. Steve DiBenedetto manages to cram a lot of painterly hysterics and crud-encrusted visual incidents into his otherwise small-scale pictures, and Mark Gonzales, a professional skateboarder who has turned his attention to verse and art, spray-paints (in black) lines of verse on mirrors. Amid the visual and aural clutter of the installation and its overriding sense of decay, Olivier Mosset's sea-foam monochrome painting is an eerie island of repose. Through July 30. (Luhring Augustine, 532 W. 24th St. 206-9100.)

"7 Women"—The title says it all—except that the women in these paintings, sculptures, and photographs have all been depicted by men. An inquiry into femininity, or a cheerful exercise in misogyny, perchance? Best to check the archcritical attitude at the door, as this show isn't particularly discursive; it does, however, include excellent works, such as one of Thomas Ruff's enormous photographic portrait heads and a rough-hewn wooden odalisque by Stephan Balkenhol. The exhibition's centerpiece is dazzlingly weird—a hyperrealist seated Stepford nude by John DeAndrea. Mel Ramos's luridly funny painting of one of his typical bosomy nudes standing beside a bull will also raise eyebrows. Through Aug. 6. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.)

Short List—**leslie bostrom,** Taylor, 529 W. 20th St. 463-7166. Through July 2. . . . **slater bradley,** Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219. Through July 2. . . . **laura emrick,** Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770. Through July 30. . . . **michael paha,** Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500. Through July 30. . . . **tony smith,** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Through July 15. . . . **rirkrit tiravanija,** Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St. 627-5258. Through Aug. 31. . . . **vangelis vlahos,** Kapernakas, 526 W. 26th St. 462-5160. Through July 17.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Barton Lidice Beneš—A collection of the artist's "museums," meticulously labelled and organized by theme. "Celebrity," for example, contains the drawstring from a pair of Kevin Bacon's workout pants, a vial of Sylvester Stallone's urine, and a starstruck hummingbird, "killed when it flew into Elizabeth Taylor's picture window in Palm Springs, 1988." It's not easy to decide whether these cubbyholes of artifacts are art, exactly, but they're certainly artful, engaging, and—one presumes—authentic. A folder of accompanying documentation includes a handwritten note from Václav Havel proclaiming, "Yes, this is really my hair!" Through July 30. (Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012.)



Paper versions of haute couture at F.I.T.'s "Papier à la Mode."

KIM DEMARCO

Cordy Ryman—Small assemblage paintings made from salvaged lumber, plastic, and steel. Like his famous father, Robert Ryman, this young artist is interested in how things attach to the wall. In one of the pieces here, the curiously shaped back of the painting turns out to be a child's potty. In another, two drywall screws, drilled through the center of several layers of translucent plastic and painted wood, become a sort of double navel. A modest but promising début. Through July 30. (Collins, 83 Grand St. 226-1861.)

Kenny Schacter / John Corbin—"Branding," the début art exhibition by this well-known downtown curator, features an assortment of lame, gift-shop-style loot, mostly T-shirts, coffee mugs, and silverware. The one memorable gag is "Group Show," an avowedly functional sperm bank (SoHo branch). Viewers can purchase the semen of individual artists, including Schacter's, for $750, or the complete collection of six artists', for $3,000. Caveat emptor: these prices represent a roughly three-hundred-per-cent markup of the going rates for civilian samples. / A puzzling installation that re-creates a set for the independent film "Joey's Practice," featuring illuminated globes hanging over a carpet shaped like Pangaea. Both shows through July 2. (Gering, 476 Broome St. 226-8195.)

Short List—**eduardo abaroa,** Tilton, 49 Greene St. 941-1775. Through July 3. . . . **pedro barbeito,** Basilico Fine Arts, 26 Wooster St. 966-1831. Through July 30. . . . **brian delacey,** Blue, 203 Lafayette St. 343-2446. Through July 18. . . . **teun hocks** and **miguel branco,** P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Both shows through July 2. . . . **deborah rosenthal,** Joseph Gallery, Hebrew Union College, 1 W. 4th St. 824-2205. Through July 16. . . . **austin thomas,** Sara Meltzer's On View, 588 Broadway. 343-8256. Through July 30. . . . **charmaine wheatley,** A.I.R., 40 Wooster St. 691-6833. Through July 8. . . . **michael zwack,** Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through July 9.

AUCTIONS

Christie's East—Fine and rare wines. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400. June 30.)

Doyle—An auction of furniture, paintings, and decorative art. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. June 30.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Judith Joy Ross / "Big Pictures, Little Pictures"—A group of well-known portraits along with several works from series not previously exhibited. / Extreme juxtapositions of scale, as viewed in a presentation of works by Harry Callahan, Chuck Close, Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil, Christian Schad, Jan Henle, and Josef Sudek. Both shows through Aug. 27. (Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.)

"Barely There"—Landscapes, portraits, and still-lifes in which the image is blurry, indistinct, or evanescent. Among the artists on view are Gerhard Richter, Roger Newton, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and John Pfahl. Through July 9. (Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166.)

"Down from Up"—Classic and contemporary images made from an elevated vantage point, by such artists as Alvin Langdon Coburn, Diane Cook, Mario Giacomelli, Emmet Gowin, Len Jenshel, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Through July 9. (Alan Klotz/Photocollect, 22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211. Closed Tuesdays.)

"Pure Products of America"—A three-artist group show of black-and-white photographs of suburban life by Robert Adams, Bill Owens, and Henry Wessel. Through July 16. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200.)

International Center of Photography—"Sea Change: The Seascape in Contemporary Photography" includes works by Robert Adams, Lynn Davis, Roni Horn, Stuart Klipper, and Randy West. Through Sept. 26. . . . ¶ "Myths, Dreams, and Realities in Contemporary Argentine Photography." Through Sept. 26. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Group Show—Works in which artifice is the subject, by Oliver Boberg, Thom Lussier, Michael O'Brien, John Schabel, and Bing Wright. Through July 30. (Dee, 118 Mercer St. 965-8884.)

Short List—**merry alpern,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through July 1. Also at Scalo, 560 Broadway. 334-9393. Through Aug. 7. . . . **sasha bezzubov** and **august sander,** Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600. Both shows through July 2. . . . **william claxton,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through July 16. . . . **william gedney,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through July 31. . . . **james karales,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through July 31. . . . **michiko kon,** Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 505-5555. Through Aug. 14. . . . **skeet mc auley,** Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500. Through July 30. . . . **ray k. metzker,** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Through Aug. 13. . . . **tina modotti and edward weston,** Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St. 223-1059. Through July 17. . . . **helmut newton,** Scalo, 560 Broadway. 334-9393. Through Aug. 7. . . . **john o'reilly,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Through July 2. . . . **maggie steber,** Camera Club of New York, 853 Broadway, at 14th St. 260-7077. Open weekdays, 1 to 5; through July 2. . . . **susan unterberg,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Through July 2. . . . **francesca woodman,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Aug. 31.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

New York Grand Opera—The company's seven-year survey of Verdi's complete operas continues with a fully staged performance of "La Traviata," here offered with several traditional cuts restored. Soprano Susan Groeschel, tenor Antonio Buonauro, and baritone Michael Corvino head the cast, and Vincent La Selva conducts. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. June 30 at 7:30. No tickets necessary. For rain-date information, call 245-8837.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Boys Choir of Harlem—The ensemble offers a program of—brace yourself—Christmas favorites. Yes, it's true: with only a hundred and seventy-nine days left before the big holiday, it's time to start cultivating that merry spirit again, and the folks at Godiva Chocolatier (who are underwriting the concert) will do their part by distributing sweets to the audience. (World Trade Center Plaza. June 30 at noon. No tickets necessary.)

Orchestra of St. Luke's—Michael Barrett leads an all-Gershwin program that includes songs (featuring soprano Karen Holvik and baritone Scott Hendricks) and the "Rhapsody in Blue" (with pianist Steven Mayer). (World Trade Center Plaza. July 2 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

Brooklyn Philharmonic—Bridget Reischl conducts Dvořák's "From the New World" Symphony, in addition to music by Copland, Gershwin, and Ellington. (Prospect Park Band Shell, Brooklyn. July 3 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

New York Chamber Symphony—Robert Mann leads the orchestra's wind players in Gounod's "Petite Symphonie," serenades by Mozart (in C Minor) and Strauss, and marches by Sousa. (Central Park Band Shell, mid-Park at 72nd St. July 6 at 7:30. No tickets necessary. In case of questionable weather, call 262-6927.)

Washington Square Music Festival—Henry Schuman leads the Festival Orchestra in an all-Mendelssohn program that comprises the E-Minor Violin Concerto (with Ole Böhn), "Fingal's Cave Overture," and "Italian" Symphony. (Washington Square Park. July 6 at 8. No tickets necessary. In case of rain, the concert will take place at New York University Theatre, 35 W. 4th St.)

RECITALS

Jacques Thibaud String Trio—Though formed only five years ago, in Berlin, this ensemble has already turned quite a few heads. Partly that's because these young musicians turn in unusually fine performances of works from the somewhat limited repertoire for violin, viola, and cello, from Mozart to the moderns. But beyond that they do something that is essentially unheard of in the world of chamber music: they play from memory, without a score or a music stand in sight. (Among active groups, the only other one that springs to mind as being so committed to memorization is Eighth Blackbird, appearing this week at both Caramoor and Maverick Concerts.) In this concert, the Thibaud Trio offers Beethoven's G-Major Trio (Op. 9, No. 1), Schoenberg's String Trio, and Dohnányi's Serenade (Op. 10). (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. June 30 at 5:45.)

New York Vocal Arts Ensemble—The group performs folk-song arrangements by Beethoven, with the instrumental accompaniments provided by violinist Curtis Macomber, cellist Christopher Finkel, and pianist Raymond Beegle. (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. July 1 at 1. No tickets necessary.)

Bargemusic—July 1 at 7:30 and July 4 at 4: Presenting string quartets by Beethoven (in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5) and Dvořák (in F Major, Op. 96, the "American"), in addition to Gershwin's "Lullaby." . . . ¶ July 2 at 7:30: Solo and chamber works by Griffes, Gershwin, Copland, Lukas Foss, Ned Rorem, and Paul Schoenfield (his "Café Music," for piano trio). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

David van Tieghem and Margaret Leng Tan—The percussionist and the pianist, both of whom are fixtures of the avant-garde, share a program, with Ms. Tan performing on a toy piano. (Prospect Park Band Shell, Brooklyn. July 2 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

Summergarden—The Museum of Modern Art's annual summer series of twentieth-century music focusses this year on women composers. In the first of the series' nine programs (each of which is performed twice), Joel Sachs leads a chamber orchestra of Juilliard students in pieces by Keyla Orozco, Augusta Read Thomas, Elena Kats-Chernin, and Betty Olivero. (Sculpture Garden, Museum of Modern Art, 14 W. 54th St. July 2-3 at 8:30. No tickets necessary. The series continues through Aug. 28.)

CLASSICAL NOTES

Fiddling Fireworks—**Paganini's Violin Concerto No. 1** is a warhorse of finite musical depth, but it merits another listen (on BIS-999) in the hands of violinist Ilya Gringolts, whose musicality and phenomenal technique far surpass what one would expect of a seventeen-year-old. This début recording places him alongside Sarah Chang (his close contemporary) in the forefront of fiddling wunderkinds. Where Chang tends toward pellucid ease of delivery, Gringolts favors incisive athleticism and expressive contrasts, more along the lines of his fellow-Russian Maxim Vengerov. There's much to marvel at in both his stirring interpretation of the concerto (lustily partnered by Finland's Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Osmo Vänskä conducting) and the other Paganini pieces that fill out the disk. These include the fearsome Unaccompanied Variations on "Nel cor più" and the "Moses" Fantasy, a bravura G-string exercise in which even the passages in harmonics remain defiantly in tune.

The American violinist James Buswell was once a Young Turk of the instrument, too, but in the late nineteen-sixties he opted out of the superstar sweepstakes to acquire a liberal-arts education at Harvard. Upon arriving there, he was disappointed to learn that Walter Piston (of the timeless textbooks on harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration) had recently retired from the faculty. Buswell's admiration for the composer's music remains intact, and his new recording of **Piston's Violin Concertos No. 1 and No. 2** (Naxos 8.559003) should win further admirers for this underappreciated figure of American modernism. The infectious First Concerto, written in 1939, displays the nationalistic fervor that inhabits much of the best American orchestral music from mid-century. The Second, from 1960, is even more persuasive, thanks to its precise emotional tone, gorgeous instrumental writing, and a slow movement of rare pathos. These elegant readings fill a shocking gap in the catalogue—but it is disquieting that the orchestra so capably assisting in these quintessential American masterworks is not one of our country's ensembles but, rather, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine.

Gershwin for the Fourth—Pianists Ilan Rechtman and Makiko Hirata perform two-piano versions of "Rhapsody in Blue" and "An American in Paris." (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. July 4 at noon.)

Salon Soirées—For the past seven years, the second-floor music room of the Hotel Wales has resounded with music every Sunday evening, in a series that has earned an enthusiastic following from hotel patrons and neighborhood music lovers. This week's recital, in which Makiko Hirata performs Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No. 8 and several Gershwin pieces, will be the last for a while, as the hotel is about to undergo renovations. The hotel's management confirms that the concerts will return once work is completed this fall. (Madison Ave. at 92nd St. July 4 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Jon Gillock—The organist, an American living in France, where he studied with the late Olivier Messiaen, performs his teacher's "L'Ascension" and "Messe de la Pentecôte," as well as three works that are believed to have never been played in public before: "Monodie," "Prélude," and "Offrande au Saint Sacrement." (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. July 6 at 7. Tickets at the door.)

OUT OF TOWN

(A selective listing of festival events within a reasonable drive from New York City. Call the presenters for complete schedules.)

Glimmerglass Opera—Opening performances of the season, which continues through Aug. 23. July 1 and July 3 at 8: "The Abduction from the Seraglio," in English. . . . ¶ July 2 at 8 and July 5 at 2: "Rigoletto." (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

Tanglewood—July 1 at 8:30: Music by Prokofiev, Mozart, and Dvořák, performed by pianist André Previn and members of the Boston Symphony Chamber Players. . . . ¶ July 2 at 8:30: Keith Lockhart conducts the Boston Pops in classic popular songs (some of which feature vocalist Ann Hampton Callaway), patriotic selections, and Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture." (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

Opera Festival of New Jersey—July 2 at 8: "Madama Butterfly." . . . ¶ July 3 at 8: "Don Giovanni." (McCarter Theatre, 91 University Pl., Princeton, N.J. 609-683-9100.)

Caramoor—July 2 at 8: The six-member contemporary-music group Eighth Blackbird. . . . ¶ July 3 at 8:30: An all-Vivaldi concert with the Orchestra of St. Luke's. . . . ¶ July 4 at 8:30: Chanteuse Andrea Marcovicci. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

Music Mountain—Two recitals by the Penderecki String Quartet and pianist Jamie Parker. July 3 at 8: Beethoven's Quartets in B-Flat Major (Op. 18, No. 6) and F Major (Op. 59, No. 1), as well as his Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major (Op. 16). . . . ¶ July 4 at 3: Quartets by Mozart (in D Minor) and Szymanowski (his Second), plus Shostakovich's Piano Quintet. (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

Maverick Concerts—July 3 at 8: Eighth Blackbird performs works by Joan Tower, Stacey Bowers, Fred Lerdahl, and Thomas Albert. . . . ¶ July 4 at 3: The St. Petersburg String Quartet plays Shostakovich's Quartets No. 2, No. 4, and No. 10. (Woodstock, N.Y. 914-679-8217.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Fourth of July—Perhaps the best way to celebrate Independence Day is to free yourself from the stifling heat of the city's asphalt and concrete. During Pier 63's annual Waterfest, which starts at noon and runs until dusk, you can leave Manhattan for the cooling environs of the Hudson River by boarding an outrigger canoe, kayak, hand-built rowing gig, or tugboat. The truly adventurous can join up with the group Swimming the Apple and take a dip in the river. Two mysterious old vessels—the John J. Harvey, a retired New York City fireboat, and the Frying Pan, a former lightship—are docked at the pier, and tours of their gnarled interiors will be available. (Twelfth Ave. at 23rd St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Over on the East River, Macy's lights up the night sky with its twenty-third annual fireworks display, starting at 9.

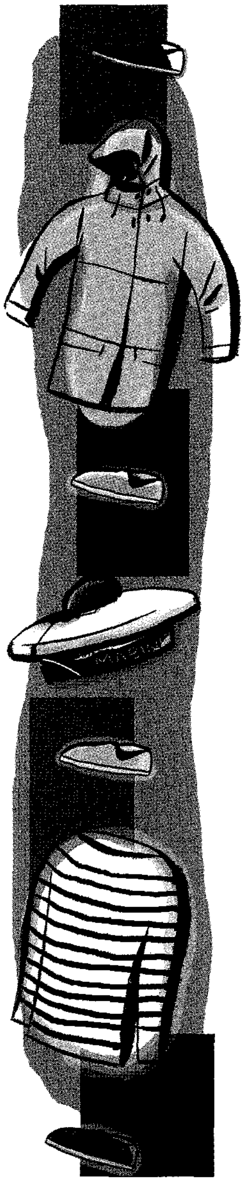
Readings—June 30 at 7:30: By Elena Lappin, from her short-story collection, "Foreign Brides." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ July 6 at 7:30: By Joyce Carol Oates, from her new novel, "Broke Heart Blues." (Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken. No tickets necessary.)

Talk—July 6 at 8: Wooster Group member Kate Valk discusses using new computer technology in the theatre. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793.)

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Old Salts

THE restless tides of fashion, which bring us white bucks one season and hot pants the next, are calmed by a few styles so seductive that they never age or slip into self-parody. Such is the happy case with maritime fashions, those striped pullovers, boat-neck sweaters, sailor hats, and deck shoes that seem to show up every summer—even in the closets of people who seldom get closer to the briny than a rowboat ride under Bow Bridge in Central Park.



At **Saks Fifth Avenue** (611 Fifth Ave.; 753-4000), a store that once took hot weather so seriously that it closed on Saturdays in the summer, high-fashion naval uniforms by Jean Paul Gaultier include a slightly goofy white linen woman's blazer with peaked lapels ($1,190) which looks like the sort of thing Joe E. Brown wore in "Some Like It Hot." A slinky blue-and-white striped rayon dress with a low cowl back ($770), more suitable for Ms. Monroe, perhaps, has an ankle-length hem that would require fancy footwork on a slippery deck. (So committed is M. Gaultier to the high seas that he offers a classic striped sailor shirt on his Web site, at www.galeriegaultier.com, for $104, or FF630.)

Club Monaco (160 Fifth Ave.; 352-0936), a shop well schooled in the subtle art of the knockoff (Ralph Lauren was sufficiently impressed to buy the company a few months back), offers jaunty replicas at encouraging prices. A white cotton skirt ($59) is fastened with buttons fore and lacings aft, in the manner of trousers made before the invention of the zipper; a man's striped sweater ($69) might have belonged to Jean Genet but for its unorthodox navy-and-sky-blue color combination.

If ersatz outfits only whet your appetite for the real thing, a visit to **West Marine** (12 W. 37th St.; 594-6065) turns up (along with copies of "Chapman's Piloting" and cans of Skid-No-More) a canary-yellow foul-weather slicker that looks as if it's made of rubber but is actually PVC-coated cotton ($45). It's guaranteed waterproof and is from a company called Helly Hansen, which has been around since 1877; the coat's New England accent, however, is acquired—the label confesses that this item was made in China.

There are no striped shirts or sailor pants to be found at the South Street Seaport, a destination that offers spectacular views of the East River from dockside cafés with names like Pizzeria Uno and Pretzel Time. Assiduous searching does reveal one thalassic treat: a natural-colored canvas carryall at the **South Street Seaport Museum** shop (14 Schermerhorn Row; 748-8663) which has been decorated with six line drawings of middy-wearing, beret-topped fellows spelling out "marine" in semaphore ($40).

Sometimes a small accessory is all that's needed to impart a salty air: at **Pastec** (459 Broome St.; 219-3922), a dimly lit cavern with an Art Nouveau stained-glass window, Venetian slippers with canvas linings, rubber soles, and glorious velveteen uppers in such colors as persimmon and fawn have arrived lately from the Friuli region of northern Italy ($45). (The proprietor maintains that these are worn by contemporary gondoliers, but it wouldn't be at all surprising if many of those boatmen were sporting espadrilles with Chinese provenances.)

For those who won't be fobbed off with a slicker or a pair of shoes, the below-decks shop **Frenchware** (110 Greene St.; 625-3131) is one of the few places in town where it's possible to accoutre yourself head to toe in Gallic nautical mufti. The classic blue-and-white striped *marinières* here hail from Brittany ($89), the shoulder-buttoned wool sweaters are ocean-spray resistant ($129), and the pompommed berets will protect the ears in a fierce nor'easter ($95). But they would all, no doubt, be just as happy cozying up to a bowl of chowder at the Oyster Bar.

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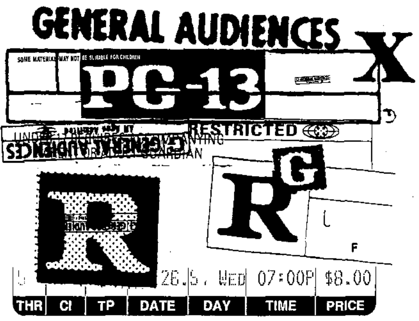


THE MOVIES

OPENING

Broken Vessels—Scott Ziehl's feature film about Los Angeles paramedics, with Todd Field and Jason London. Opening July 2.

Love Etc.—The story of a romantic triangle, directed by Marion Vernoux. In French. Opening July 2. (The Screening Room.)

The Lovers on the Bridge—The Pont-Neuf in Paris is the backdrop for this love story. With Juliette Binoche and Denis Lavant; directed by Léos Carax. In French. Opening July 2. (Film Forum.)

Shiloh 2: Shiloh Season—The continuing adventures of a boy and the dog he rescued. Directed by Sandy Tung. Opening July 2.

South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut—A feature-length movie based on Trey Parker and Matt Stone's animated series, directed by Parker. Opening June 30. (East 85th Street, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Summer of Sam—Spike Lee looks at the effect that the serial killer known as Son of Sam had on a Bronx neighborhood in 1977. Opening July 2.

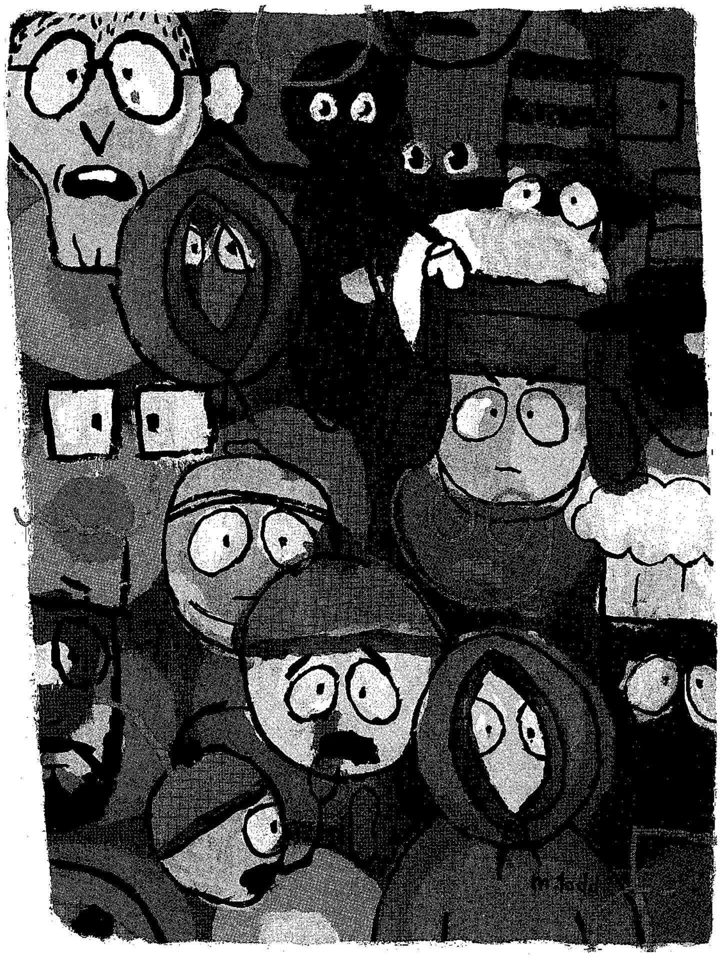
Wild Wild West—A comedy-adventure film, with Will Smith, Kevin Kline, and Kenneth Branagh; directed by Barry Sonnenfeld. Opening June 30. (Astor Plaza, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Besieged—An art film in the bad sense of the term. In an old Roman house, an eccentric English pianist (David Thewlis) and his beautiful housekeeper (Thandie Newton), a refugee from an African dictatorship, circle around one another in a series of frustrated and (for the viewer) frustrating semi-encounters. The director, Bernardo Bertolucci, who wrote the screenplay with Clare Peploe, shies away from the intensity that we want and need in this chamber drama by using a variety of trick editing processes that slow or interrupt the action; the characters not only elude each other, they elude us, too. Only the handsome cinematography and the music that the pianist plays—passages of Bach, Beethoven, and Grieg—make a direct, unaffected appeal to our senses and emotions.—*David Denby* (Paris, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)



Opening June 30, "South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut."

MARK TODD

Buena Vista Social Club—In 1996, the blues guitarist Ry Cooder gathered together some wonderful Cuban musicians in their seventies and eighties for a successful recording project. Two years later, Cooder went back to Cuba, this time accompanied by cameras and the German director Wim Wenders, seeking out the men and women of Cuban music on the streets and in the old dance halls of Havana. In this beautiful city that got left behind by the global economy, the bedraggled stone buildings and pre-revolutionary Chevys and Dodges have aged into pure soulfulness. So have the musicians, who still look great, play beautifully, and exude a stirring seriousness and dignity. The movie comes closer to pure happiness than anything else in the theatres at the moment, and it has an intriguing and moving subtext: the Cubans' buried but irrepressible love of things American.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Caught (1948)—This movie, with its portrait of Howard Hughes, is probably the most American of Max Ophuls's American movies. Ophuls had suffered at Hughes's hands—had wasted time on worthless projects and been referred to as "the oaf." Here, a vicious, half-mad millionaire (Robert Ryan) marries a young innocent (Barbara Bel Geddes) in order to spite his analyst. The movie centers on the desperate predicament of the girl when, pregnant, she realizes that she is just a cynical joke to her husband. James Mason plays the doctor who tries to help her. Curt Bois appears as the millionaire's slimy pimp—a worm who finally turns. The script, by Arthur Laurents, was built on stories that Ophuls told him about Hughes, and on the accounts given by one of Hughes's girls.—*Pauline Kael* (Walter Reade Theatre; July 2-3.)

The General's Daughter—A classic case of Hollywood hypocrisy and ineptitude. On an Army base in the South, investigators Madeleine Stowe and John Travolta (acting with his belly and chin) try to solve the murder-rape of an Army captain—the general's daughter. The movie expresses its outrage over violence against women by showing the victim naked and spread-eagled again and again. The lurid narrative is so disorganized that even one's lowest appetites remain unsatisfied. With James Cromwell, Timothy Hutton, and James Woods. Directed by Simon West and written by Christopher Bertolini and William Goldman, from a novel by Nelson DeMille.—*D.D.* (Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

Girl Shy (1924)—Harold Lloyd perfected the silent-comedy version of the game of Gotcha. In this picture's tumultuous finale—the hero's chase to save his true love (Jobyna Ralston) from marrying a bounder—every feat of dexterity and wit ends in a gut-clutching reversal. As befits a farce, the outcome is a tribute less to acrobatics than to fate. Lloyd plays a timid stutterer who's written a howler of a how-to book on lovemaking. Rich girl Ralston sets her cap for him after he saves her tiny dog from a train conductor. But even when he courts her in a quiet rural setting the universe surrounds him with embarrassments—a pig nursing her young ones, boys stripping for a swim, a tree sticky with sap. It's a piquant lark.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum 2; July 5.)

An Ideal Husband—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

Instinct—Anthony Hopkins plays a distinguished anthropologist who lives happily amid the mountain gorillas of Rwanda but goes ape when some rogue park rangers try to eliminate the peaceful furry beasts. Several years later, he's stuck in a ward for the criminally insane in a Florida prison, and Cuba Gooding, Jr., a hot-shot young psychiatrist, tries to spring him. It seems that the anthropologist, despite his violent habits, is a deeply moral man with a Rousseauian take on the corruptions of civilization and the benevolence of life in a state of nature. This unfortunate rubbish, written by Gerald DiPego (from a novel by Daniel Quinn) and directed by Jon Turteltaub, preaches against violence while attempting to excite us with the peculiar spectacle of Hopkins bashing people twice his size. The only pleasurable element in it is the performance of Gooding, whose charm and intelligence, products of high civilization, neatly undermine everything the filmmakers are trying to say.—*D.D.* (6/14/99) (East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, State, Sutton, and Union Square.)

Limbo—John Sayles's latest, and was there ever a case of so much turning into so little? In Alaska, a gutsy road-tavern singer (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) and a stoic former fisherman with a dark secret (David Strathairn) get together and take off in a boat, accompanied by the singer's resentful teen-age daughter (Vanessa Martinez). Through no fault of their own, the trio get stranded on a deserted, rainy island way up north with nothing to do but wait for the cold and listen to Martinez read from a child's diary that she discovers in an abandoned cabin. Mastrantonio is wonderful—if properly framed and supported, her performance might have been a classic. But Sayles can't seem to pull the elements of narrative filmmaking together. He sets up all sorts of tensions—tourism versus native industry, the pride of loneliness versus the pull of family—and abandons them, leaving the audience in a frostbitten mood. The impressively bleak cinematography is by Haskell Wexler.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

The Loss of Sexual Innocence—The new Mike Figgis film marks one of his irregular forays into dreamy experiment. In a loose way, it tells the story of Nic; we see him as a young boy in Africa, as an older boy back in England, as a sexually thwarted teen-ager (played by Jonathan Rhys-Meyers), and then as an adult (Julian Sands) who leaves his family and travels back to the desert. These episodes are spliced with the story of Adam and Eve: a black man and a white woman rise naked from a lake and take it from there. There is much that is infuriating and pretentious here, but you can forgive Figgis almost anything, because his ambition allows him to stumble upon sights that no other director could envisage; there is one section, entitled "Twins," that is the most haunting thing he has ever done. Two adult sisters who were separated at birth (both played wonderfully by Saffron Burrows) pass each other at an airport. The heartache of their near-miss needs a whole movie to itself.—*Anthony Lane* (Village East Cinemas.)

Man Bites Dog (1993)—A mock documentary from hell: a film crew follows a personable young psychopath named Ben (Benoit Poelvoorde) as he dispatches his fellow-Belgians. There is every sort of murder here, and the film spares us no detail; its gritty, abrasive look only adds to the gruesomeness. Yet there is comedy of a cruel sort, for Ben is effusive, even charming, as he talks us through the ways and means of a dedicated killer. He is also a bigot, stuffed with barroom philosophy; the film comes across as the plain man's guide to slaughter. It was directed by Rémy Belvaux, who appears throughout as the documentary director—shy and flustered, torn between keeping his crew alive and wanting to join in the hideous fun. In French.—*A.L.* (Florence Gould Hall; July 6.)

Mogambo (1953)—Clark Gable as a mighty hunter in Africa, in a remake of "Red Dust," which he'd starred in twenty-one years before; Ava Gardner plays the old Jean Harlow role—the wisecracking, tough broad—and Grace Kelly does her hot-ice bit as a ladylike prig (the old Mary Astor role). Gable certainly doesn't have the animal magnetism he had in the earlier version, but when Gardner and Kelly bitch at each other, doing battle for him, they're vastly entertaining anyway. (Gardner never seemed happier.) The director, John Ford, got a little carried away with African wildlife ("Red Dust" was faster and funnier), but this sexual melodrama never takes itself too seriously.—*P.K.* (Bryant Park; July 5.)

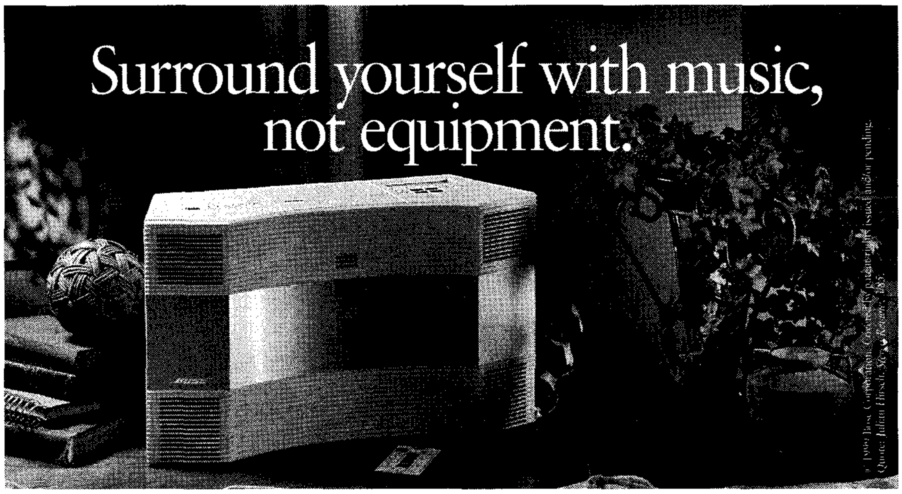
Notting Hill—The first outing for screenwriter Richard Curtis and leading man Hugh Grant since their collaboration on "Four Weddings and a Funeral." The new movie is less inclined to tomfoolery; the gags are quieter and more sparsely planted. Grant plays a London bookseller named William Thacker; Julia Roberts plays Anna Scott, a movie star who wanders into his store. The two of them fall in love, then out of love, and so on; you feel lulled rather than excited by the sway of the plot, and Curtis's essentially benign attitude—most of the characters are charming but screwy, and they get along just fine—seems to tame the director, Roger Michell.—*A.L.* (6/7/99) (Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Red Violin—Joshua Bell's impassioned violin soars above a dark matting of strings in John Corigliano's soundtrack score—the most valuable element to emerge from this grandiose French-Canadian movie project. In form, it's an omnibus film that chronicles, in three historical vignettes, a prologue, and an epilogue, the life of a great violin made in Cremona in the late seventeenth century. A small boy in eighteenth-century Austria, an English nineteenth-century violin virtuoso who has sex and plays wildly at the same time (quite a trick), and an isolated lover of Western music during China's Cultural Revolution are all touched by the violin's powers. But is the instrument cursed or blessed? A glory or a menace? The director-screenwriter team, François Girard and Don McKellar, don't seem to have worked out a coherent idea of what the violin means, and when they try to tie things together, in a modern auction-house scene in which representatives of the earlier owners of the violin come together and bid on the instrument, we don't care who gets the violin or why. The style of the movie veers unsuccessfully between humorless piety and opéra-bouffe clownishness. With Samuel L. Jackson as a canny rare-instrument specialist who has his own plans for the fiddle.—*D.D.* (6/14/99) (Beekman, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, and Union Square.)

Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace—It has been more than twenty years since George Lucas directed a movie. Amid the fuss that has attended his return to the fray, no one seems to have wondered whether he was up to the task. With this film, Lucas demonstrates two facts: one, that he has kept abreast of the recent leaps in special effects, and two, that he hasn't a clue what to do with all the nondigital figures, otherwise known as "people." Three fine actors were lured into this farrago: Ewan McGregor plays the young Obi-Wan Kenobi, Liam Neeson is his Jedi mentor, Natalie Portman plays a teen-age queen, and all of them look as if they were recently abused by robots.—*A.L.* (5/24/99) (East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Olympia, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

Summer (1987)—In this movie, the fifth in Eric Rohmer's six-part cycle of "Comedies and Proverbs," the filmmaker relaxed his customary iron control over narrative: the picture was made in an on-the-run documentary style, in 16 mm. and with direct sound, and the dialogue, usually chiselled and epigrammatic in his work, was largely improvised by the actors. The heroine, Delphine (Marie Rivière), is a slim, dark, delicate-featured depressive. Since breaking up with her boyfriend, she has become almost pathologically wary of experience: her response to everything is refusal. The French title, "Le Rayon Vert," means "the green ray," and it refers to a rare optical phenomenon that occurs the instant after the sun drops below the horizon: Jules Verne wrote that it enables whoever views it to "see clearly into his own heart and the hearts of others." When this miracle appears to the wretched Delphine, in the last scene, it's one of the purest moments of happiness ever put on screen. In French.—*Terrence Rafferty* (Florence Gould Hall; July 6.)

Tarzan—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, Guild, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Village East Cinemas.)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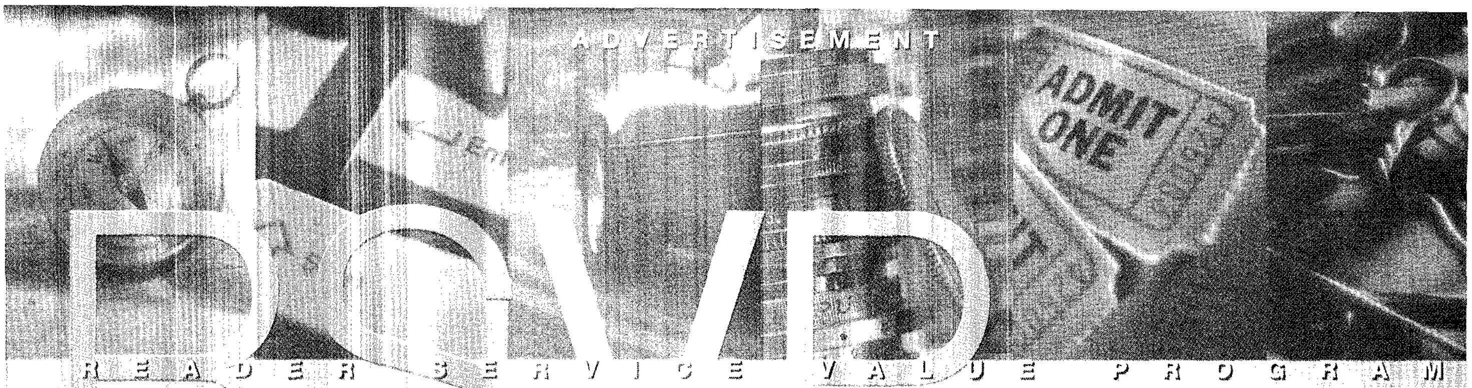

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16 A + S + PEN
18 TI(g)ER
19 TONI(c)
20 NABOKOV (anag.)
21 VERONESE (anag.)

DOWN
1 PROS(TRAT)E (*tart* rev.)
2 T + A + NG
3 E(DI)TS
4 PEE(LE)R
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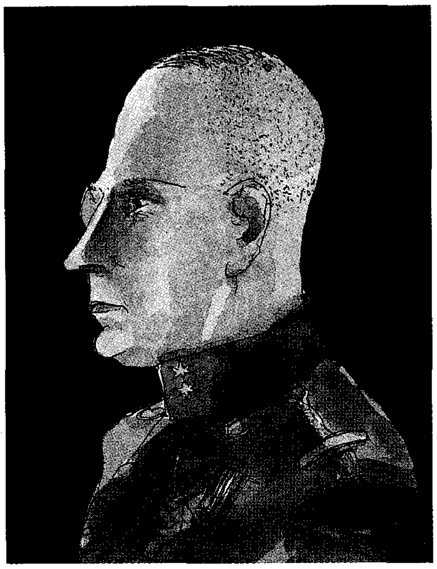
ALSO PLAYING

AFTER LIFE: Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **AN AMERICAN LOVE STORY:** Film Forum. . . . **ANALYZE THIS:** Sutton and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **BIG DADDY:** Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, Waverly, and Union Square. . . . **COMING APART** (1969): Cinema Village. . . . **COOKIE'S FORTUNE** (reviewed in our issue of 4/12/99): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE DAY OF THE BEAST:** Cinema Village. . . . **THE DREAMLIFE OF ANGELS** (4/5/99): Quad Cinema. . . . **EDGE OF SEVENTEEN:** Quad Cinema. . . . **ELECTION** (4/26 & 5/3/99): Murray Hill Cinemas and Village East Cinemas. . . . **ENTRAPMENT:** Criterion Center and 59th Street East Cinema. . . . **THE KING OF MASKS:** Cinema Village. . . . **LIFE:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE LOVE LETTER:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE MATRIX** (4/26 & 5/3/99): Criterion Center and Union Square. . . . **A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM** (5/17/99): Union Square. . . . **THE MUMMY** (5/10/99): State and Union Square. . . . **MY SON THE FANATIC:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **NEVER BEEN KISSED:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **REGRET TO INFORM:** Art Greenwich Twin. . . . **RUN LOLA RUN:** Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **TEA WITH MUSSOLINI:** Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, 34th Street Showplace, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **TWIN DRAGONS:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **A WALK ON THE MOON** (4/12/99): 34th Street Showplace. . . . **WHEN LOVE COMES:** Quad Cinema. . . . **THE WINSLOW BOY** (5/17/99): First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.



ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY: *Erich von Stroheim was born in 1885 and lived until 1957, but his career as a director was over by 1928, with the advent of sound, and his work seems inseparable from the magnificent grandeur and folly of silent film. The son of a Jewish manufacturer of straw hats, von Stroheim showed up in Hollywood in 1914 as the self-styled Erich Hans Carl Maria Stroheim von Nordenwall, a descendant of a noble Prussian military family. He then spent much of his career either as an actor, playing decadent, thin-lipped, and monocled aristocrats, or as a director, dissecting the debaucheries of the disintegrating Hapsburg ruling class. He was a faker but not a fraud: for the arrogance of the aristocrat he substituted the arrogance of the obsessed artist. Film Forum's two-week retrospective presents some of his work as an actor and his major films as a director, including the legendary abridged masterpiece "Greed" (1925), in which von Stroheim, adapting Frank Norris's American classic, "McTeague," achieved a sardonic, disillusioned realism that makes it one of the truly harrowing works of the silent cinema.*

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

FILM FORUM 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films directed by or with Erich von Stroheim. June 30: "The Lost Squadron" (1932, George Archainbaud) and "Three Faces East" (1930, Roy Del Ruth). . . . July 1: "Blind Husbands" (1919) and "Friends and Lovers" (1931, Victor Schertzinger). . . . July 2-3: "Greed" (1924) and "The Great Gabbo" (1929, James Cruze). . . . July 4: "The Merry Widow" (1925) and "As You Desire Me" (1932, George Fitzmaurice). . . . July 6: "Foolish Wives" (1922) and "Queen Kelly" (1928). . . . ¶ Harold Lloyd films. July 5: "Girl Shy" (†) and "A Sailor-Made Man" (1921).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films distributed by the Strand Releasing company over the past ten years. July 1 at 2:30: "Steam: The Turkish Bath" (1998, Ferzan Ozpetek; in Italian and Turkish). . . . July 1 at 6: "Inside" (1996, Arthur Penn). . . . July 2 at 2:30: "Stonewall" (1995, Nigel Finch). . . . July 5 at 3: "The Delta" (1996, Ira Sachs). . . . July 6 at 6: "Pink Narcissus" (1971, James Bidgood). . . . ¶ A program of films featuring or about Paul Robeson. July 1 at 6 and July 3 at 5:15: "I'm a Negro, I'm an American" (1989, Kurt Tetzlaff). . . . July 2 at 3: "The Proud Valley" (1939, Penrose Tennyson). . . . July 2 at 6: "Tales of Manhattan" (1942, Julien Duvivier). . . . July 2 at 8:15: "Native Land" (1942, Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand). . . . July 3 at 1: "Song of the Rivers" (1954, Joris Ivens). . . . July 3 at 3: "Paul Robeson and Earl Robinson Sing for the GDR" (1954) and "Paul Robeson" (1958, Vasily Kantian; in German and English). . . . July 4 at 1: "King Solomon's Mines" (1937, Robert Stevenson). . . . July 4 at 3: "Jericho" (1937, Thornton Freeland). . . . July 4 at 5: "The Emperor Jones" (1933, Dudley Murphy). . . . July 5 at 6: "Paul Robeson: Here I Stand" (1998, St. Clair Bourne). . . . ¶ A program of Fred Astaire films. July 2 at 6 and July 4 at 5: "The Gay Divorcée" (1934, Mark Sandrich). . . . July 2 at 8 and July 4 at 2: "Top Hat" (1935, Sandrich). . . . July 3 at 2 and July 5 at 6: "Damsel in Distress" (1937, George Stevens). . . . July 3 at 5 and July 5 at 2:30: "The Band Wagon" (1953, Vincente Minnelli). . . . ¶ A program of early Stanley Kubrick films. July 6 at 2:30: "The Killing" (1956). . . . July 6 at 6: "Paths of Glory" (1957).

WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of films directed by Max Ophuls. July 1 at 1, 4:30, and 8 and July 4 at 4 and 7:30: "The Bartered Bride" (1932, in German). . . . July 1 at 2:45 and 6:15 and July 4 at 5:45: "Happy Heirs" (1933, in German). . . . July 2 at 1 and 6:15 and July 3 at 4 and 8: "Caught" (†). . . . July 2 at 3 and 8:15 and July 3 at 6: "The Exile" (1947). . . . July 5 at 1 and 5:15 and July 6 at 1: "Flirtation" (1932, in German). . . . July 5 at 3 and 7:15 and July 6 at 3: "From Mayerling to Sarajevo" (1940; in French). . . . ¶ July 3-4 at 2: "The Fly" (1958, Kurt Neumann).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—A program of films by Spike Lee. July 1 at 7: "Malcolm X" (1992). Mr. Lee will be present. . . . July 2 at 4, 6:45, and 9:20: "Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads" (1983) and "Making 'Do the Right Thing'" (1989). . . . July 3 at 1:30, 4, 6:45, and 9:20: "Do the Right Thing" (1989). . . . July 4 at 1:30, 4, 6:45, and 9:20: "School Daze" (1988). . . . ¶ Films by Robert Bresson. July 5 at 1:30, 4, 6:45, and 9:20: "Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne" (1945). . . . July 6 at 4, 6:45, and 9:20: "Mouchette" (1967).

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—July 3-4 at 1: "Saving Private Ryan" (1998, Steven Spielberg). . . . July 3-4 at 4:15: "The Thin Red Line" (1998, Terrence Malick).

BRYANT PARK, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.—Mondays, starting at dusk: free drive-in-style moviegoing, beginning with coming attractions, trailers, and cartoons. The feature on July 5 will be "Mogambo" (†). (For rain-date information, call 512-5700.)

FLORENCE GOULD HALL, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—July 6 at 12:30, 3:30, and 6:30: "Summer" (†). . . . July 6 at 9: "Man Bites Dog" (†).

A DIFFERENT LIGHT BOOKSTORE, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On July 4 at 7, the feature will be "Hello, Dolly!" (1969, Gene Kelly).

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

ANGELIKA FILM CENTER, 18 W. Houston St.
ART GREENWICH TWIN, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
ASTOR PLAZA, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
BEEKMAN, Second Ave. at 66th St.
CHELSEA CINEMAS, 260 W. 23rd St.
CHELSEA WEST, 333 W. 23rd St.
CINEMA I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA 3RD AVENUE, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA VILLAGE, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
CORONET CINEMAS, Third Ave. at 59th St.
CRITERION CENTER, Broadway at 44th St.
EAST 85TH STREET, First Ave. at 85th St.
EAST 86TH STREET CINEMAS, Third Ave. at 86th St.
EASTSIDE PLAYHOUSE, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84TH STREET SIXPLEX, Broadway at 84th St.
59TH STREET EAST CINEMA, 239 E. 59th St.
FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
FIRST & 62ND CINEMAS, 400 E. 62nd St.
GOTHAM CINEMA, Third Ave. at 58th St.
GUILD, 33 W. 50th St.
KIPS BAY THEATRE, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS, Broadway at 63rd St.
LINCOLN SQUARE, Broadway at 68th St.
METRO CINEMA 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
MURRAY HILL CINEMAS, 160 E. 34th St.
NEW YORK TWIN, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19TH STREET EAST 6, Broadway at 19th St.
OLYMPIA I AND II, Broadway at 107th St.
ORPHEUM VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
PARIS, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
PARK & 86TH STREET CINEMAS, 125 E. 86th St.
QUAD CINEMA, 34 W. 13th St.
THE SCREENING ROOM, 54 Varick St. *(334-2100)*.
62ND & BROADWAY, 62 W. 62nd St.
64TH AND 2ND, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72ND STREET EAST, Third Ave. at 71st St.
STATE, Broadway at 45th St.
SUTTON I AND 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34TH STREET SHOWPLACE, 238 E. 34th St.
UNION SQUARE, Broadway at 13th St.
VILLAGE EAST CINEMAS, Second Ave. at 12th St.
VILLAGE THEATRE VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
WAVERLY I AND 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
WORLDWIDE CINEMAS, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
ZIEGFELD, 141 W. 54th St.

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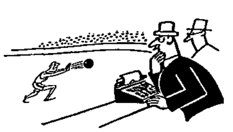
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

Goodfellas, badfellas.



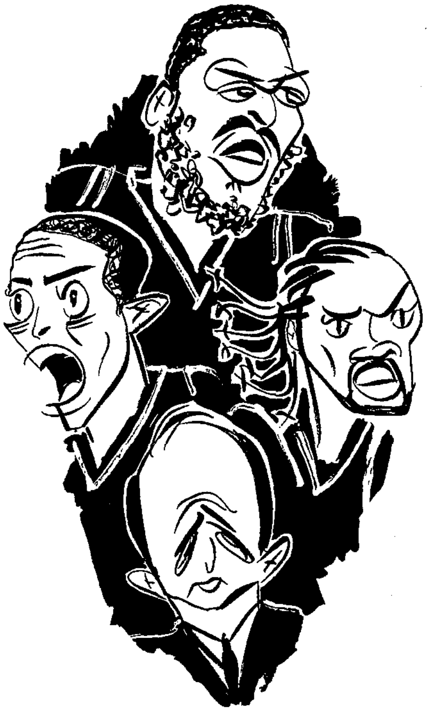
It's a pretty extraordinary thing that some of the most serious American newspapers often cover sports as closely, and with as many resources, as they cover, say, news. Or foreign news, at least. At many big-city papers, the lead sports columnist is the franchise player, the most widely read and sometimes the highest-paid writer. Bob Ryan in Boston, Mike Lupica in New York, Randy Galloway in Dallas, Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon in Washington, Mitch Albom in Detroit—they're all top dogs in town. Part-time jobs on television and radio have only increased their market value.

A sweet job, you'd think: lots of time off, nice trips, no one shooting at you or making you wade through indictments or government documents. And yet sportswriters are, as a rule, spectacular complainers. They bitch about the quality of the free food in the press-room. They gripe about their seats at the Super Bowl. One suspects, though, that the whining is not quite genuine but, rather, an ironic acknowledgment that this is a pluperfect gig.

There is one legitimate problem. For anyone covering sports in the age of television—to say nothing of the age of ESPN, ESPN2, NBC.com, and twenty-four-hour-a-day sports-talk radio—there isn't much story left to describe by morning. Only the tardy or the literal-minded fan really needs a written recap over coffee. We've already seen the game—seen it live, seen it in real time, in slo-mo, in film clips all night long.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Often, what's left to the sportswriter is a deadline brand of Freudian analysis. And the nature of the analysis consists largely of middle-aged, middle-class white men issuing judgment on young African-American millionaires. This sort of writing has been around since the fifties, when Jimmy Cannon and Milton Gross at the *Post* tried to assess the phobias and night sweats of Floyd Patterson. But the trend is now all-pervasive. Deep moral questions are raised. Is a player a "good guy," like Derek Jeter (*Sports Illustrated*), or is he, like Marcus Camby or Latrell Sprewell, a "Gen-X knucklehead" (the *Times*)?

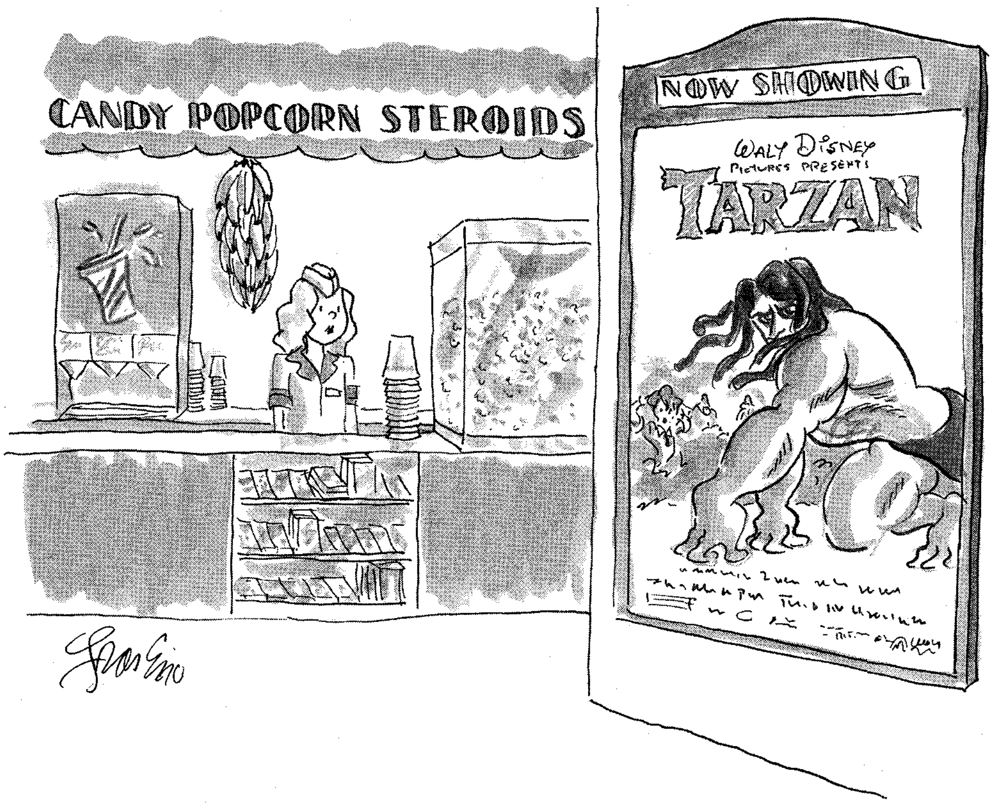


Clockwise, from top:
Larry Johnson, Latrell Sprewell,
Jeff Van Gundy, Marcus Camby

In New York, we've come to the end of a basketball season dominated like no other by incessant character analysis, along with feelings of elation and discomfort. Elation because we watched an erratic and confused set of players come together at just the right, late-spring moment and produce what seemed like three miracles a week to reach the N.B.A. finals. Discomfort because we were made to understand that certain of these Knicks were not exactly good guys, and some of us who ended the season cheering them had been dismissive of them at the start, figuring that their mediocrity on the court was the just retribution for their character.

Latrell Sprewell came to the team after having famously choked his last coach. Larry Johnson was not infrequently nasty to Knick staffers and reporters: he is equipped with so great a sense of insular self-drama that, in the midst of the fateful series against San Antonio, he declared that he and his teammates were a band of "rebellious slaves." (Johnson is a rather pampered Nat Turner; he makes more than ten million dollars a year.) During the strike-truncated regular season, Mike Wise, one of the basketball writers for the *Times*, sternly declared that Marcus Camby was uncoöperative, and Sprewell was a man still "in his Terrible Twos," and that the Knicks front office would end up regretting the trades that had brought them here. On the sidelines, the Knicks coach, Jeff Van Gundy, looked like someone who hated his life—an umbrellaless man standing in the rain having just missed the six-fifteen to Babylon.

The Knicks were, over many dispiriting games, a woeful .500 team—disorganized, boring, and ornery. In column after column, their character was assessed as . . . bad. For many fans of the relaxed-jeans generation, these players were clearly undeserving of the glory still accorded the last championship Knicks: the good guys—Willis, Clyde, President-in-Waiting



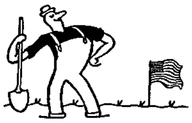
Bradley & Co. But then, as the Knicks started winning, as Camby and Sprewell, L.J. and the lithe scorer Allan Houston transformed the Knicks into a true ensemble of speedy bebop wizards, everything changed. Down went the Heat! (Bye-bye, Riles!) Out went the Hawks! (See ya, Dikembe!) Exeunt the Pacers! (Nice brick, Reg!) Up went the volume at the Garden. Let's go, Knicks! Suddenly, Ernie Grunfeld, the general manager who had been fired by the Garden's president, Dave Checketts, for the crime of assembling this crew, began to look like a martyred genius. Checketts also had to beg Van Gundy's forgiveness for fibbing about his secret late-season dealings with a potential job-seeker, Phil Jackson.

Although the Knicks would ultimately fall in the Finals, the string of confounding victories led to a re-analysis. Mike Wise stepped forward with a column for the June 13th *Times* headlined "SPREWELL HAS CHANGED A CRITIC'S PERCEPTION." He wrote contritely, "In retrospect, I did not get it." Some of Wise's columnist-antagonists at the *News* and the *Post* undoubtedly felt the apology was late in coming, but it's remarkable that it came at all. Wise, as many belated Knick lovers might admit, was not alone in his miscalculations. The problem all along had been the character-analysis game. Like it or not, goodness is a bonus, not a requirement, for playing ball. It was always thus: Ted Williams could be abusive of his fans, and even the sainted DiMaggio was, at times, unsaintly. Winning made "good guys" of the "bad guys." In sports it usually does.

—DAVID REMNICK

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL

Clinton for Senate: The Sequel.



In an anonymous gray office building on West Thirty-fourth Street last week, workers were painting walls and installing phone lines, building the stage set for the first great political drama of the new millennium—the Hillary Clinton for Senate campaign. O.K., it's only the "exploratory committee," but no one's fooled at this point. In the six months since the First Lady's candidacy began evolving from talk-show novelty into virtual sure thing, it's been clear that nothing could top this race for its improbability, its unpredictability, and the chutzpah of its protagonist.

Or could it? Could Mrs. Clinton's campaign in her soon-to-be-adopted home state simply be a middle chapter in her family's political life? Over the past several weeks, some old friends of the First Family have been talking about a different Clinton and a different campaign. These people believe that Bill Clinton will run for the United States Senate from Arkansas in 2002. One person who has spoken to the President about the possibility of this campaign described his reaction as "noncommittal but interested."

Everyone involved stresses that the conversations are preliminary and that a great deal may happen in the intervening three and a half years to prevent such a race from taking place. Still, the historical novelty of an ex-President in the Senate has caught the interest of Clinton's friends—and of Clinton himself. If Clinton won, he would be the second ex-President to serve in the Senate. His fellow-impeachee, Andrew Johnson, served for five months before his death, in 1875.

The incumbent in the Arkansas Senate seat might make the race especially tempting for Clinton. He is Tim Hutchinson, a freshman Republican elected in 1996, who voted to convict Clinton of both counts against him in the impeachment trial, earlier this year. What's more, Tim's brother Asa, who represents the northern Arkansas congressional district that Clinton sought unsuccessfully in 1974, helped prosecute Clinton as one of the House managers. Surely the President would enjoy quashing the chances for a different family to establish a political dynasty back home. (And it is his home; his Senate race at least would not feature the geography quizzes—"Spell Schenectady!"—that are likely to figure prominently in his wife's contest.)

But it's an understatement to say that there are many potential questions about another Clinton run. For starters, what effect would the possibility of Bill's race have on Hillary's campaign? What does a possible Empire State–Little Rock–Capitol Hill commute mean for America's most scrutinized marriage? Having served for eight years as leader of the free world, does Bill

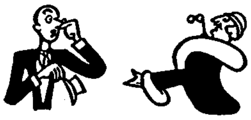
Clinton go back to making the circuit of Arkansas "coon suppers" and begging for campaign contributions? (It's a safe bet that Senator Hutchinson would be flush with cash from the day Clinton announced against him.) What about the Dreamworks job?

Of course, no one knows the answers to any of these questions, and we may as well get used to stories about the First Couple's future job prospects. When Clinton leaves office, in a year and a half, he will be just fifty-four years old—the youngest ex-President since Theodore Roosevelt. Or, to put it another way, Bill Clinton will be Strom Thurmond's age in 2043.

—Jeffrey Toobin

THE POLITICAL LIFE

Georgette Mosbacher's new man.

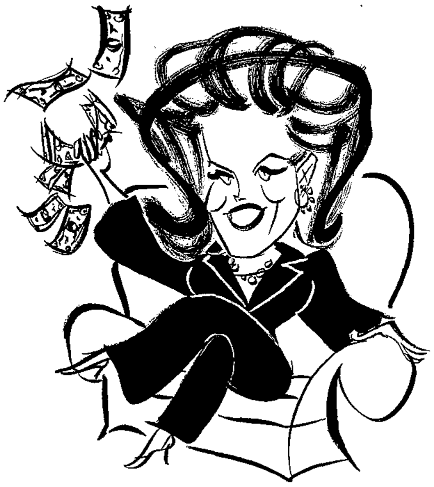


It was not yet noon one day last week, but Georgette Mosbacher—socialite, businesswoman, Republican activist, and self-help author—was already showing enough cleavage to get herself banned in Boston or, perhaps, in these days of Puritan zeal, legislated against in Washington. Luckily, on this particular day, she was in New York, working a cell phone from a corner table at the restaurant in the Four Seasons Hotel. She interrupted a directive that she was giving an assistant back at the office to mouth "Sorry" through impeccably made-up lips. At fifty-two, she still has the wide-eyed, girlish glow of Melanie Griffith getting to play the boss in "Working Girl."

Mosbacher is famous for her financial success, both in business and in marriage. She has had three rich husbands, the most recent being the Texas oil tycoon Robert Mosbacher, who served as George Bush's Commerce Secretary. Her new book, "It Takes Money, Honey," encourages women to achieve financial freedom by "putting a price tag on your dreams," and offers tips such as walking your dog in the sort of neighborhood you would like to live in, in order to "meet someone who's already arrived." Now Mosbacher, who in early June was named one of four national-campaign co-chairmen by Arizona's Republican senator John McCain, is focussing her ability to cultivate cash on the field of Presidential politics.

The alliance between the unabashed material girl and McCain, who has made his political reputation as a maverick champion of campaign-finance reform, may at first seem unlikely. But, as McCain explained over the phone last week, in politics right now "the rules are the rules." Having someone like Mosbacher on his team could be a distinct advantage. "Georgette has entrée into a lot of areas, political as well as financial," he said.

Mosbacher grew up in a small Indiana steel town and says she was forced to learn early in life that, as she puts it in her book, "cash is king." On a rainy day in 1954, shortly after her seventh birthday, her father, who was uninsured, was killed in a car accident, leaving her mother nearly destitute. As her mother scraped together odd jobs to support herself and her four children, Georgette took in ironing and dreamed of emulating the plucky glamour of her movie-star heroines, Maureen O'Hara and Katharine Hepburn. "I visualized myself rich, and eventually I became rich," she said. Shortly after graduating from college, she devised the first of many lucrative schemes: after attending a Sotheby's auction, she posed as a reporter to track down one of the major bidders, a Los Angeles real-estate developer much older than she who happened to be rich and single, and who became her first husband. Her second husband was a wealthy but abusive cosmetics executive who was also her boss. By the time she met Mosbacher, on a blind date, she said that she had learned the importance of self-sufficiency. Not long after the wedding, with financial help from Mosbacher, she bought a cosmetics company, La Prairie, and turned it into a success.

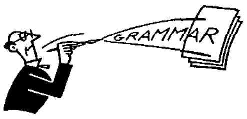


Georgette Mosbacher

Over coffee, Mosbacher described her third marriage, which ended in divorce three years ago, as "a fairy tale" and, with tears welling up in her eyes, said, "I'm just barely turning the proverbial corner. There are no words to express the pain of a broken heart. I didn't know what betrayal was. This was a man I loved, trusted, adored!" What has "truly helped," she said, is having a new man to think about, and a cause larger than herself—the Presidential aspirations of John McCain. She said that she agonized about the decision to side with McCain, whom she knew socially, because she has also known George W. Bush well for years. Bush, she confided, is quite different from his father: "His father is very patrician. G.W. is truly a street fighter." Although she admires Bush, she regards McCain as a genuine American hero. Moreover, it was he who offered her a significant role in his campaign, not long after she threw a party for him at her Fifth Avenue apartment which was attended by Michael Bloomberg, Pete Peterson, Ron Perelman, and other moguls. Since then, Mosbacher has been busy diverting money from donors' wallets to McCain's coffers. Her secret? "You can't be embarrassed to ask for it." —Jane Mayer

INK

A quote from Homer Simpson perturbs the paper of record.



At the outset, it is important to make one thing perfectly clear: the *Times* is not in turmoil over Homer Simpson's exclamation "D'oh!" We have it on the authority of Bill Borders, a *Times* senior news editor. During a recent telephone interview, a reporter suggested to Borders, in a lighthearted way, that that was indeed the situation. "The newsroom is not in turmoil over how Homer Simpson says 'D'oh!' " Borders countered. "The whole premise of this conversation is false!"

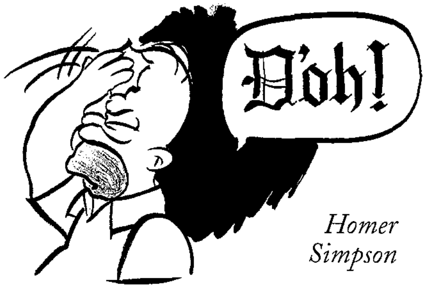
The whole premise of the conversation was the following: Every day, a thick document called the Greenies circulates at the *Times*. Compiled by Borders, the Greenies is made up of photocopies of items in previous days' *Timeses*, each one critiqued by editors; the issues can range from niggling questions of transliteration to the merits of a headline. A recent edition included an extract from an Our Towns column about Hartford, Connecticut, by Iver Peterson. Peterson's column recounted how, in the previous week's episode of "The Simpsons," Homer agreed to enter a "How Low Can You Go" contest, because he believed the prize was a trip to Hawaii. Only later did he discover that the trip was actually to Hartford.

Peterson wrote, "This prompted the Hartford *Courant* to ask the cartoon show's producers if Hartford had been insulted. No, said the producers. A trip to upstate New York would be an insult, they said, but a sucker prize to Hartford, that was a compliment. This seemed to satisfy the *Courant. D'oh.*" On the Greenies, the last word was circled with the comment "Well, we've been spelling it *duh*. And that's how it's pronounced."

"Simpsons" fans at the *Times* reacted immediately and forcefully. A subsequent edition of the Greenies included the same item with handwritten responses from two other editors. "Absolutely true," one said, "if we had meant 'duh.' But 'd'oh' is a very specific Homer Simpsonism, almost always accompanied by an 'I could have had a V8' strike at the forehead, pronounced to rhyme with 'no' but with a Homeric guttural thingie in the middle." The other note read, "I beg to differ. Homer Simpson does indeed say 'd'oh!' As if to say 'How could I be so stupid?' 'Duh' means something like 'How stupid can you be?' " Such give-and-take in the Greenies is uncommon, and apparently there were other protests, which were not reproduced.

Peterson, reached at his home in Connecticut, said, with mock gravity, "My point of view did not prevail." For him, the issue was the apostrophe—he didn't believe it was necessary. "It's entered the popular language as 'doh,' " he said. "It's the way my fifteen-year-old son pronounces it, without the guttural sound." But before the piece went to press Peterson's editors had checked with "The Simpsons" and got the official spelling: "D'oh." As for Borders' inability to tell the difference between "d'oh" and "duh," Peterson said, "This is an editor who is not au courant with 'The Simpsons' arcana."

Borders, meanwhile, would not explain how the issue came to be debated at the *Times* with such passion and exegetical precision. "I don't care how Homer Simpson says 'D'oh!' " he said, adding, "The Greenies are an internal document not intended for talk outside the New York *Times!*" The editor thereby asserted a privilege for the Homer Simpson controversy that the *Times* typically denies to national secrets.



Homer Simpson

—JAMES COLLINS

DEPT. OF HOOPLA

My best friend's bridal shower.

On the night of the shower for Graciela Braslavsky, Andy Cohen was still working through some of the issues that gay men have when a woman they worship gets married. "On the one hand, Graciela's marriage is a blessing," said Cohen, a thirty-year-old senior producer at CBS News, who was hosting the bridal shower, for gay men only, in a friend's East Village duplex. "On the other hand, it's tragic because I can't marry her myself." He was feeling other things, too: threatened, even by the bride's "incredibly tolerant" fiancé; concerned that the bride's downtown divadom would be dissolved by what he called her "unfathomable lunge into possible domestic bliss"; and alarmed that she had already moved to the Upper East Side. "This is such a mindblower on so many levels," Cohen said with a sigh.

Although he was excited about the upcoming wedding in Vermont, Cohen doesn't normally like weddings. "They depress me," he said as his guests arrived. "I usually end up dancing with my mom, who's looking at me to see if I'm O.K., or some strange woman who assumes I want to dance because I'm gay." Just then, the guest of honor announced herself on the intercom, and Cohen started running around and telling people to get their cameras. "Let's not forget that tonight is a celebration," he said.

The bride-to-be, an ebullient producer for VH1, arrived with a new Britt Ekland hairdo, Ann-Margret mules, Lina Wertmüller sunglasses, Zsa Zsa Gabor shopping bags, and a giant Lolita lollipop that matched her tight red gingham skirt. She air-kissed violently. She used French liberally ("A party for *moi*?"), apologized for being late ("Sorry, boys, it was just hellish on Mad"), and drank shots of Jack Daniel's. "Andy taught me to believe in myself," she said in a toast to her host. "But then all my gay friends have always seen a little something extra in me."

The lights were dim, the drinks were stiff, the music was loud, and in the bathroom the toilet seat was up all night. ("We really should keep it down out of respect to Graciela," Cohen said.) But in most respects it might have been any bridal shower. There were guests who love weddings and guests who hate them, guests in black and guests not in black, guests chain-smoking, networking, and, with the vague discomfort of people who know the bride but not one another, standing around eating shrimp and asking when she would open her presents.

The invitation had specified "no gifts bought above Eighteenth Street or having to do with kitchens or bathrooms or china," but the admonishment hardly seemed necessary.

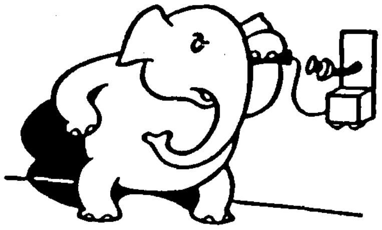
"*J'adore!*" Braslavsky kept saying as she modelled red stiletto mules, a little Tibetan handbag ("So Dharma"), fake-fur-covered handcuffs, and a poncho from Dollywood. She also received some Boudoir perfume by Vivienne Westwood ("She's everything about tomorrow today!") and a Pucci scarf hidden in a Tupperware container. The bride, who is registered at Bergdorf Goodman and Trash and Vaudeville, looked up and asked, "Hey, who's keeping a list for my thank-you notes?"

Nobody, but by then it was too late to worry about anything, even two female crashers who had come in around midnight and were getting drinks at the bar.

"Should I throw them out?" Cohen asked the guest of honor.

"No, I'm open," Braslavsky told him. "That's the millennium vibe."

—BOB MORRIS



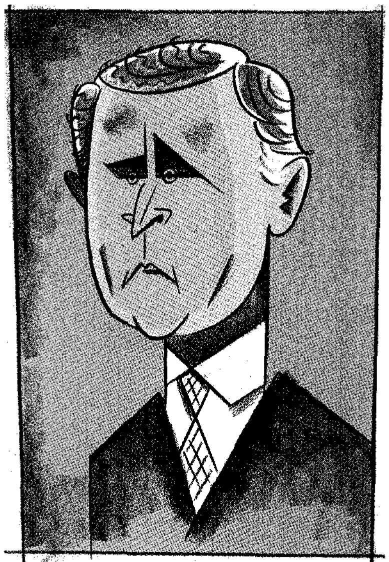
THE CAMPAIGN

Sermons for nonbelievers.

At the top of the printed text of the first formal speech that Governor George W. Bush delivered as a Presidential candidate, in Iowa in early June, there was a stern advisory to the multitude of reporters assembled to record the moment: "Note: Governor Bush deviates from his prepared text." This seemed a hopeful sign, the promise of spontaneity, but so far Bush has yet to mess around in any significant way; he delivers the same message, using the same words, over and over—with the charm and obstinacy of Ronald Reagan, whose press corps at times would repair to the nearest hallway for games of liar's poker, secure in the knowledge that when the Gipper held forth the song would always be the same. Which is not to say that Bush is boring: his message may be the most curious, and least remarked upon, aspect of his steamroller campaign.

Reagan's was a perfectly calibrated anthem, burnished by years of after-dinner speaking to conservative audiences. He presented a series of anecdotes—some of them true—demonstrating the depredations of the federal government, the dreadful Russkies, and the permissive liberals while celebrating the traditional values of faith, family, and patriotism. Reagan thus created the template for a generation of Republican speakers, the red meat served to country-club audiences across the land—a very satisfying dish when delivered with a smile and a nod, as the Master always did, but one that could easily lead to indigestion when offered to the general public by such back-yard burger-flippers as Newt Gingrich and Tom DeLay.

Bush's message is more subtle than Reagan's, and so unobtrusive that it is usually dismissed or overlooked, as it was by the horde of lobbyists who filled his campaign coffers with an estimated two million dollars at a Washington fund-raiser last week. But it is not unambitious. It is, in fact, the first significant Republican rebellion against the Reagan template. The words are not particularly radical. This governor isn't angry, or hortatory. If Reagan had the ability to make himself seem larger than life, Bush somehow appears smaller. He's not quite as tall as his father, not quite as serious, but he is markedly more accessible—he has the humor and humility, and sense of irony, of a former goof-off. (He couldn't resist a private screening of the Austin Powers sequel three days before he began campaigning, and later he jokingly compared himself to Dr. Evil's miniature clone, Mini-Me.) When Bush speaks to smaller groups, he lowers his voice and conveys a powerful intimacy—I saw him do this in an employees' cafeteria at a circuit-board factory in New Hampshire—while using almost exactly the same words he uses when speaking to larger crowds. And the audiences tend to respond more to his presence than to his message: "He seems easygoing, concerned, no bull," said Therese Donahue, a Democrat listening in the cafeteria. "The most important quality he has is you trust him."



George W. Bush

Republican audiences seem more relieved than inspired: he is charming and speaks in coherent sentences, an improvement on the Party's last two nominees, Bush *père* and Bob Dole. He does sound a few familiar themes: he promises to cut taxes and to "rebuild" the military. But these are mentioned only in passing; the bulk of his speech is about other things—extremely odd things, for a Republican—like "the burdens on the conscience of a successful nation." He speaks of creating a society where "the strong are just and the weak are valued," and making sure "no child is left behind," and offering "practical help to women and children in crisis," and giving money to charitable and religious groups for "after-school programs, maternity group homes, drug treatment, prison ministries." He actually funded such programs in Texas.

These are not applause lines for most Republican audiences. On a mid-June Monday evening in South Carolina, for example, several hundred thousand-dollars-per-couple donors searched desperately for things to cheer as the Governor of Texas used the word "heart" ten times and the word "love" seven times in the course of his standard stump speech. They were thrilled when Bush took oblique swipes at Bill Clinton: "I will swear to uphold the dignity of the office" was perhaps his best-received line. But vast tundras of compassionate conservative oratory were traversed in total silence—a reaction I had noted earlier in Iowa and New Hampshire. Republicans in all three states seemed equally puzzled by the emphasis on poor people. Doug Nash, a businessman from Spartanburg, said he thought the main message was "limited government"—although Bush's notion of limited government was, Nash conceded, quite a bit less limited than his own. "Look," he said, "I'm not ashamed to say I'm with this guy because I want to win."

This is a calculation that the political community assumes George W. Bush has made: he is saying all this "compassionate" stuff in order to win. But few Democrats—especially "new" Democrats, like Bill Clinton—have spent so much rhetorical energy on the poor in recent years. They talk about the "forgotten" middle class (a group Bush hardly mentions); they aim at suburban women. It may be that, since Bush can't really go after soccer moms on issues they care about (like abortion and gun control), he is forced to imply his empathy by talking about "women and children in crisis." It couldn't also be that he actually cares. Could it? —JOE KLEIN

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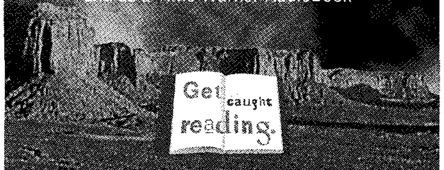

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ANNALS OF FINANCE

TIME BOMB

There is something that Wall Street doesn't want you to know.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

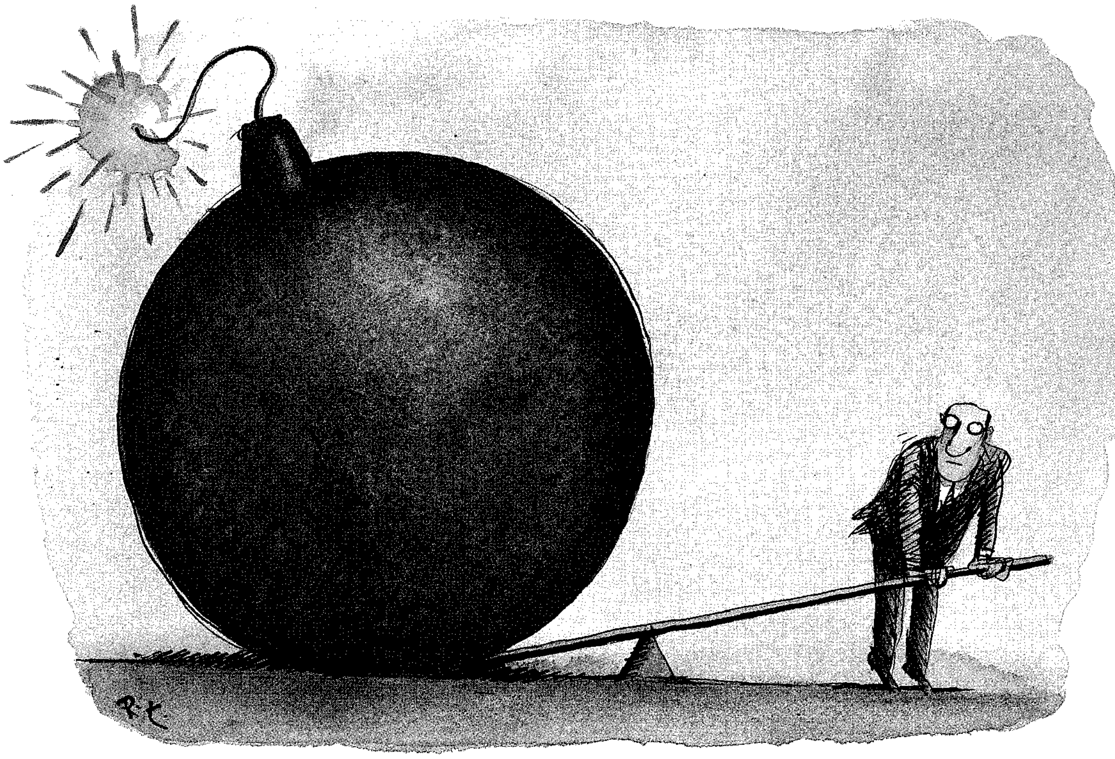
SOME years ago, I visited the trading floor at Salomon Brothers, which at that time prided itself on being the biggest, most aggressive trading house on Wall Street. As I made my way around the room, which was roughly the size of a football field, I saw men in red suspenders and yellow ties bellowing into telephones, men in yellow suspenders and red ties staring at computer screens, and men whose dress code I can't remember sitting with their feet on their desks shouting at one another. Rounding a corner, I came upon a quieter area, which, at first sight, looked like the systems department. Dozens of computer monitors were stacked on top of each other, and endless lists of numbers were scrolling down their screens. In front of the monitors, five or six nerdy-looking men were watching the numbers and talking. They didn't look at all like the others. Their shirts appeared to have been bought at Syms, not Barneys. Their ties were ill-fitting. Their hair cascaded around their ears. "That's the bond-arbitrage department," my host, a dapper South Carolinian called Bob Baker, told me. "They're all math Ph.D.s from M.I.T."

I didn't take much notice of them, but these unkempt figures hunched over terminals turned out to be the most successful and influential group of traders that Wall Street has seen in decades. For several years, they created hundreds of millions of dollars in annual profits for Salomon. Then, in the early nineties, they quit, moved to Greenwich, Connecticut, and set up their own investment firm, Long-Term Capital Management, where they made hundreds of millions in annual profits for themselves. Last summer, their luck changed: they nearly went bankrupt and, according to some observers, almost took the entire financial system of the United States down with them. In the end, they managed to stay in business, but only just. At the instigation of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, a consortium of major banks and investment companies pumped $3.6 billion into the firm, and took ninety per cent of its equity in return.

The near-collapse of Long-Term Capital prompted thousands of articles, several official reports, and at least two books. We now know how much money Long-Term Capital lost (about four billion dollars), where the money was lost (all over the world), and why it was lost (the nerds got their sums wrong). In other ways, though, the media outpouring has served to confuse rather than to inform. Much of it has dwelt on the nefarious activities of "hedge funds," a term that is rarely defined but makes a nice catch phrase for journalists who want to excoriate speculators for their evil ways. That probably suits the big Wall Street firms that rescued Long-Term Capital just fine, because it shifts the focus from where it ought to be: on them.

Long-Term Capital got itself in trouble by borrowing too much money and investing it in fancy ways that it mistakenly believed to be safe. Virtually all its borrowings came from well-known firms, such as Chase Manhattan, Goldman Sachs, J. P. Morgan, and Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, which were falling over one another to do business with it. Without the enthusiastic support of the Wall Street establishment, there is no way that Long-Term Capital could have built up a speculative position so large that its collapse would have posed, in the words of William McDonough, the president of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, "unacceptable risks to the American economy."

Long-Term Capital was, to be sure, a hedge fund—like any unregulated investment fund that manages money for rich investors—but it was a very unusual hedge fund. In many ways, it was more like the proprietary-trading desk of the major investment house where most of its partners started out. (The links between Long-Term Capital and Salomon were so strong that some people in the financial community referred to the firm as "Salomon North.") Both the type of complex trading strategies favored by Long-Term Capital and the size of the debts that the firm took on were previously unheard of in the hedge-fund industry. Although other new hedge funds eventually began to mimic Long-Term Capital's techniques, its main competitors were the big commercial banks and the big investment houses—which also happened to be its biggest creditors.



The Long-Term Capital collapse threatened to bring down the system, but hedge funds aren't the real culprits.

RICHARD THOMPSON

The banks and investment houses didn't just extend credit to Long-Term Capital. They also used their own money to make similar types of investments, and when Long-Term Capital's bets went south so did many of theirs. (The bond-trading desks at Goldman Sachs, for example, lost more than five hundred million dollars during last year's financial crisis.) If, as many commentators have argued, hedge funds like Long-Term Capital are a potential menace to the capitalist system, the same must be true of their illustrious siblings on Wall Street. To argue otherwise is to ignore the way in which the financial industry has developed over the past few decades.

ALFRED W. JONES, a Wall Street investment manager who wanted to "hedge" his clients' risk by buying stocks he considered cheap ("going long") and selling stocks he considered overvalued ("going short"), set up the first hedge fund, in 1949. Twenty years later, there were about a hundred and forty such funds; today, there are around three thousand, and the assets under their control amount to almost a trillion dollars. (Nobody knows the exact figure.) In terms of assets, hedge funds are now about a quarter the size of commercial banks, and about a fifth as large as mutual funds.

Certainly, there are some important policy issues arising from the recent proliferation of hedge funds. Whereas commercial banks are regulated by the Fed, and securities firms are regulated by the Securities and Exchange Commission, hedge funds are not regulated by anybody. Indeed, they are legally exempt from the two major pieces of legislation which govern other firms in the financial industry: the Securities Exchange Commission Act of 1934 and the Investment Company Act of 1940. In order to remain exempt from the Investment Company Act, hedge funds must have fewer than a hundred investors, or, alternatively, their investors must be worth at least five million dollars each. (In order to avoid the reporting requirements of the Securities Exchange Act, hedge funds must have fewer than five hundred investors.) The securities laws were designed to protect ordinary investors from Wall Street tricksters. Rich people were viewed as smart enough to look after themselves.

Some hedge funds file cursory annual statements to the Commodity Futures Trade Commission, which oversees the futures markets. Others don't disclose anything about their activities. Although hedge funds are often classed together, they come in all shapes and sizes. Some, such as George Soros's Quantum Fund and Julian Robertson's Tiger Management, specialize in speculating on currencies and over-all market movements. (These are known as "macro funds.") Others, such as Leon Levy's Odyssey Partners, favor a more traditional style of investment, based on picking stocks. The vast majority of hedge funds are small, with less than a hundred million dollars in capital. About thirty or forty hedge funds have more than a billion dollars in capital, and five or six are major financial institutions, with more than five billion dollars in capital.

At its peak, Long-Term Capital Management, which started trading in February, 1994, was one of the latter, and it was atypical in other ways, too. The firm was founded by John Meriweather, a reclusive type who had previously been in charge of bond trading at Salomon. (Meriweather figured prominently in "Liar's Poker," Michael Lewis's entertaining account of Wall Street in the eighties.) Meriweather was responsible for hir-

"Fortunately, I think we have an extremely accurate copy of it in the museum's gift shop."

ing the young professors and ex-graduate students, who were well versed in the mathematical models of finance that have been developed during the past thirty years. These quantitative analysts, or "quants," included two future Nobel-laureate economists: Myron Scholes, from Stanford, and Robert Merton, from Harvard. Under Meriweather's direction, the recruits applied their theoretical learning to trading bonds, with excellent results. Within a few years, they constituted the firm's most profitable department.

In 1991, after a scandal involving the United States Treasury Department's regular auction of government bonds, Meriweather left Salomon. (A senior Salomon bond trader, Paul Mozer, was accused of trying to corner the market. Meriweather wasn't implicated, but as Mozer's boss he was dragged into the scandal.) Meriweather moved to Greenwich, taking Scholes, Merton, and the rest of his nerdy crew along with him. The new firm had no trouble raising money, despite the fact that each investor had to put up at least ten million dollars for three years. Long-Term Capital made full use of its legal status as a hedge fund to avoid disclosing information about its business, but, unlike other hedge funds, its success didn't depend on making large bets on individual stocks or currencies. (George Soros's Quantum Fund once made a billion dollars in profit from an enormous wager against the British pound sterling.)

Instead of playing hunches, traders at Long-Term Capital used computers to discover temporary pricing anomalies between similar securities. At one point, for example, the firm sold newly issued thirty-year Treasury bonds and bought thirty-year Treasuries that had been issued a few months previously and were yielding a slightly higher rate of interest. In another instance, the firm bought high-yielding Italian bonds while selling lower-yielding German bonds of the same duration. These so-called "convergence trades" were based on the idea that prices would move in ways that could be predicted by mathematical models, regardless of what happened to the dollar or the Dow Jones Averages. This element of predictability seemed to offer the prospect of healthy investment returns at minimal risk. Since Long-Term Capital placed its bets in a wide variety of markets in dozens of countries, it also appeared to be well diversified. Even if some of its bets turned sour, others would surely pay off, thereby limiting the downside, even in adverse markets. (Until last year, Long-Term Capital was often referred to as a "market neutral" fund.)

The new firm's symbiotic relationship with the rest of Wall Street was reflected in the fact that many of its investors were senior executives at rival firms. They included David Komansky, the chairman of Merrill Lynch; James Cayne, the chief executive of Bear Stearns; and Donald Marron, the chairman of PaineWebber. Also among its investors were prominent European institutions, such as Union Bank of Switzerland, Société Générale, and Bank Julius Baer. (Enthusiasm for the new venture spread to the public sector, too. The Italian central bank and the Bank of China both took stakes.) It wasn't just the expectation of generous returns that caused leading financial firms to invest in Long-Term Capital. They were also eager to find out how Meriweather et al. did it. They hoped that by backing Long-Term Capital they could learn some of the firm's techniques and use them to make money for themselves. In the years following Long-Term Capital's formation, they did just that.

In 1995 and 1996, Long-Term Capital delivered annual returns of more than forty per cent; in 1997, the figure was about twenty per cent. At the time, many people attributed this stellar performance to the genius quotient in Greenwich. (In addition to the two future Nobel winners, the firm counted among its partners two former Ivy League professors and a former vice-chairman of the Fed.) In retrospect, Long-Term Capital's early successes—and its ultimate failure—can be explained by one word: leverage.

The "magic of leverage," as John Kenneth Galbraith once referred to it, has seduced speculators for centuries. A person with a hundred dollars who borrows another hundred and invests in a stock that goes up by ten per cent sees his capital increase not by a mere ten per cent but by twenty per cent. If the person with a hundred dollars borrows a thousand dollars and the stock goes up by the same amount, his capital doubles. Unfortunately, when things go wrong the leverage works in reverse. If, instead of going up by ten per cent, the stock goes down by ten per cent, the person who has borrowed a thousand dollars sees his capital wiped out.

Of course, most people and firms can't put down a hundred dollars and borrow a thousand dollars for speculative purposes.

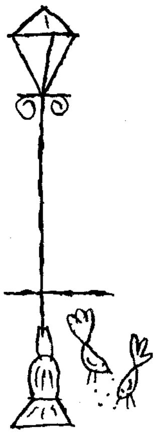
Following the Great Crash of 1929, which ruined many leveraged investors, the federal government introduced strict limits on speculative borrowing. Mutual funds, for example, can borrow fifty cents for each dollar they have invested in stocks. Commercial banks can borrow more, but they, too, must meet strict capital requirements, and so do securities houses. Hedge funds, on the other hand, can borrow as much money as their creditors are willing to lend them, and in the case of Long-Term Capital that was a vast amount. At the start of August, 1998, the firm had $4.1 billion in capital and about $125 billion in investments, which translates into a leverage ratio of about thirty to one. On August 17th, Russia defaulted on its loans, and markets around the world moved sharply against Long-Term Capital's expectations. The arithmetic of leverage proved inexorable. By August 31st, the firm's capital had slipped to $2.3 billion. Three weeks later, it had fallen a lot further, and Meriweather and his partners were on the verge of bankruptcy.

To some leading financial economists, that is about all there is to the Long-Term Capital story. "If you lever up a position greatly, then you are going to end up with some probability of losing an awful lot of money," Richard Roll, an economist who also helps manage an investment fund, told me recently from his office at U.C.L.A. "No model says you are going to be right a hundred per cent of the time." Merton Miller, a Nobel laureate at the University of Chicago, agreed. "Their big mistake was being so highly levered," he said. "They played the game, and they got hit by an extreme move in the markets."

That is undoubtedly true, but from a wider perspective the key question is why Long-Term Capital was allowed to build up a speculative position so large that the firm's collapse could have threatened the prosperity of the entire country. As a recent government report noted, "Long-Term Capital appears to have received very generous credit terms, even though it took an exceptional degree of risk." Some of Long-Term Capital's liabilities were straightforward loans. Most were arcane transactions involving futures, swaps, options, asset-backed securities, repurchase agreements, and the rest of the paraphernalia of modern finance. These instruments come in a bewildering variety of forms, but they all facilitate the construction of big leveraged positions. Long-Term Capital had more than sixty thousand trades on its books when it got into trouble. Each of these transactions had a counter-party, which took the other side of the trade, and it was usually a big commercial bank or a big investment bank. The fear that these banks would start dumping their positions simultaneously, a move that could have triggered a general financial panic, prompted the Fed to intervene.

Each of the firm's creditors knew about its own dealings with Long-Term Capital, but none had any idea how much money other creditors had lent the firm, or how the money was being used. Since Meriweather and his partners viewed their creditors as competitors, and rightly so, they were reluctant to give out any information about their own finances. "By the end, none of the securities firms knew how leveraged Long-Term was," a senior official at the Securities and Exchange Commission told me. "Nobody outside the firm had an overview of Long-Term's positions and exposure. That was one of the problems."

Why were powerful Wall Street firms willing to extend so much credit to what was, to all intents and purposes, a blind investment pool? For one thing, Long-Term Capital, which traded incessantly and on a massive scale, was a big source of fees and commissions. At the same time, the firm posted collateral for its speculative positions, and this generated a false sense of security. (Creditors didn't appear to realize that in a crisis the value of this collateral might shrink sharply, leaving Long-Term Capital unable to bridge the gap.) But the most important factor in Wall Street's willingness to ship money up to Greenwich was the belief that Long-Term Capital had somehow repealed the oldest law in finance: that higher returns can be generated only at the cost of higher risk.



This was an illusion, of course. Although Long-Term Capital appeared to be well diversified, it was actually making a gigantic one-way bet, a circumstance that did not become clear until August of last year. The essence of the bet was that the gap in interest-rate yields between liquid securities and less liquid securities would narrow. (Liquidity refers to the ease with which assets can be bought and sold. A Treasury bill is extremely liquid. A junk bond is relatively illiquid, so its yield is higher, to compensate the investor for the difficulty that he may have selling it.) "It was inherent in many of their trades that they were selling liquidity; they were short liquid assets, and long less liquid ones," André Perold, a Harvard Business School professor who is preparing a case study of Long-Term Capital, told me. "Their biggest mistake was that they didn't realize how correlated their positions were." Unfortunately, liquidity spreads didn't narrow. Instead, they widened—to an extent rarely seen before. After Russia defaulted, investors all over the world dumped illiquid securities and tried to buy more liquid ones. A few months later, the markets settled down and the yield spreads narrowed somewhat, but by that time Long-Term Capital had been taken over by its creditors.

In the wake of the bailout, the President's Working Group on Financial Markets, an interagency body formed after the stock-market crash of October, 1987, set out to determine what had gone wrong, and what broader lessons could be learned. The Working Group's report, which was released in April, was stronger on analysis than on recommendations. "The central public policy issue raised by the Long-Term Capital episode is how to constrain excessive leverage more effectively," it asserted, and it went on, "The near collapse of LTCM illustrates the need for all participants in our financial system, not only hedge funds, to face constraints in the amount of leverage they assume." The phrase "all participants in our financial system" clearly encompassed the major commercial and investment banks. At the end of 1998, according to the Working Group's report, the five biggest commercial banks in the country had fourteen dollars of borrowings for every dollar of capital. The average leverage ratio at the five biggest investment banks was a remarkable twenty-seven to one.

This figure means that firms like Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, and Morgan Stanley Dean Witter were just as highly leveraged as Long-Term Capital was before it ran into difficulties. True, securities firms and commercial banks have more diverse sources of revenue than hedge funds have, and they are subject to government regulation, but they also have higher operating costs, and, in some cases, their assets may be even more illiquid—both factors that would make them vulnerable in a crisis. Like Long-Term Capital, the big Wall Street firms rely on a diversified portfolio of assets, with a large number of offsetting positions, to prevent such an eventuality. But because they have tens of thousands of trades on their books it is far from easy to measure the over-all level of risk they are taking. One popular method is to use value-at-risk models—mathematical toys that simulate the effects of big market movements. Unfortunately, such models are usually based on recent data, and they tend to break down in the sort of crisis that occurred last August and September. "These measurements of potential exposure became virtually meaningless in the third quarter of 1998, as the volatility of the underlying securities increased beyond the historical levels incorporated into the risk models," the President's Working Group noted.

FOR some Wall Street veterans, the main lesson to be drawn from the Long-Term Capital story is that the current regulatory framework, which was created sixty years ago, is hopelessly outdated. "We need improved financial oversight," Henry Kaufman, a former senior partner at Salomon Brothers who now runs his own consulting firm, told me. "We need a process that will clearly state what capital standards are required, what reporting requirements ought to be imposed, what the trading and accounting standards should be for all major markets and all major institutions. At the moment, we don't have any of these things." Given the powerful interests involved, and the practical difficulties inherent in setting up a comprehensive system of financial regulation, there is little prospect of such a vision coming to fruition. Even the far more modest idea of bringing hedge funds under official supervision has been rejected, largely because of a fear that it would encourage them to set up shop overseas, where their activities would be even more opaque. "Everybody went through the process of saying, 'Let's just regulate the suckers,' but then we drew back and said, 'How would it work?' " a senior Washington official told me. "We came to the conclusion that it would work from a public-perception standpoint but not from a practical standpoint."

The President's Working Group did propose a series of measures that Gary Gensler, the Under-Secretary for Domestic Finance, told me were designed to "make private markets work better." These included forcing hedge funds to disclose details of their activities, encouraging banks and securities firms to lend more cautiously, and asking everybody concerned to pay more attention to risk. "This was a nothing burger if ever there was one," Merton Miller, the Chicago Nobelist, said when I called to ask him about the report. " 'Be careful. Set standards.' Sure, we know all that. I haven't seen one serious suggestion for legislative change."

That is slightly unfair. The bankruptcy code has already been modified in the wake of Long-Term Capital's problems. Forcing hedge funds to file quarterly financial reports would require more action by Congress. So would expanding the Securities and Exchange Commission's right to demand information from Wall Street firms that lend to hedge funds. Both changes were recommended in the government's report. Miller is right about one thing, though. As yet, there is no sign that these proposals from the President's Working Group will be enacted in legislation. "We have not received anything, and it's not clear if we are going to receive anything," David Runkel, a spokesman for the House Banking Committee, told me a couple of weeks ago. Even if a bill does make its way along Pennsylvania Avenue, there is scant chance of its being voted through any time soon. "This is not a subject that is at the top of anybody's screen," Runkel added. "Last September and October, it was a hot issue. But not now."

The questions raised by the Long-Term Capital saga are almost certain to arise again. Even in the unlikely event that the recommendations of the President's Working Group are passed into law, they will not alter a central fact: many investment firms are extremely highly leveraged institutions, with only an imperfect idea of the over-all risks they are taking. Next time there is a major shock to the financial markets, it might be another big hedge fund that finds itself in trouble, but hedge funds aren't the only ones in danger. It could equally well be a big investment firm or a commercial bank that needs a bailout. ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

DEAR CAMPAIGN DIARY

BY BRUCE McCALL

Neat idea: Get Elvis Prisley (sp.?) to stump (same home state!). But *Tipper O.K.'s lyrics first.*

To Do: (1) Tree-of-the-Month Club delivers tomorrow. Photo op? Bill C. says I'm great at digging holes. (2) Do mirror exercises. Today: dramatically loosen tie (but not if clip-on—Tipper). (3) Need replacement line for "I want to be remembered as your Swampland Reclamation President." (4) Follow up on idea of phone booth on White House lawn. (Get Janet to check if it's same or different than fund-raising calls from office.) (5) Did I invent *Internet* or *Nintendo*? Rack brain!

Bill C. reminder: Joke first, punch line *after*. Write on knuckle. "March of the Wooden Soldiers" as campaign song? Hillary kidding? Hillary *not* a kidder. Love march music, but did I invent? (Maybe spent boyhood summers on Sousa's farm, or was that Bill C.? Sure knows lots of farmer's-daughter jokes!)

Speech: Fix transitions. "But if I can get serious for just a moment, carbon-monoxide particulates are no laughing matter." I like! (Remember to flash smile before segueing to snail-darter doomsday scenario.) "Frankly, I didn't invent the climbing hydrangea so that our children and our children's children would grow up in a world without it." (Make "zero" with thumb and forefinger.)

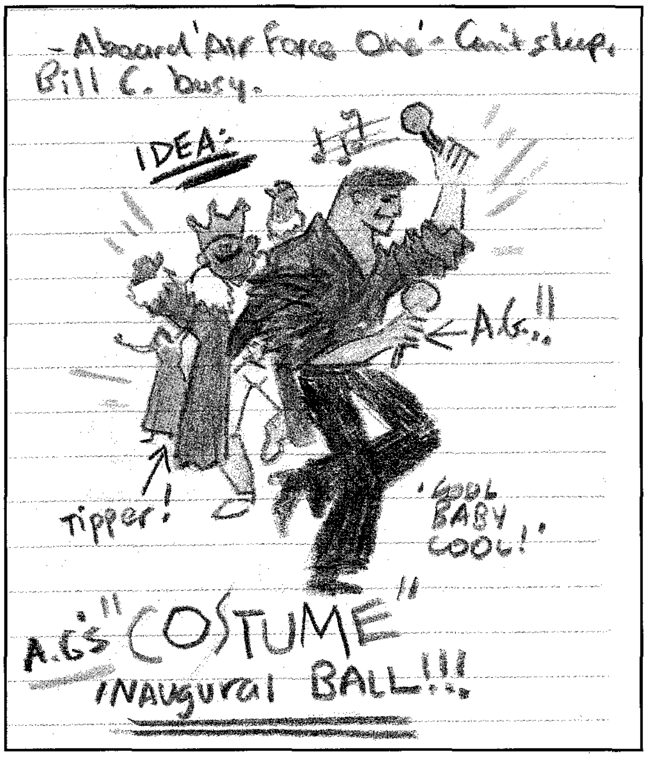
"I want to be remembered as your Tough New Radon Standards President." Getting closer!

Work on more casual look. (Write "Roll up *both* shirtsleeves" on other knuckle.) Check with I.L.G.W.U. to see if suits come in non-blue.

"I want to be remembered as your Solar-Energy Tax-Deduction President." "I want to be remembered as your Article 55-A Set-Asides President." Who says A.G. "just doesn't get it"?

Maybe use Tipper-falling-asleep-while-I-was-proposing bit to kick off Boy Scout Jamboree keynote? (Why "Tipper"? Remember to ask! Hillary not "Hipper"!! Frankly "bugs" me. Who says A.G. not emotional guy?)

Shouldn't it be "Vidal Gore"? That "bugs" me, too! It's been a last name in our family for years.


– Aboard 'Air Force One' – Can't sleep. Bill C. busy.
IDEA:
A.G.!!
Tipper!
'Cool Baby Cool!'
A.G.'s "COSTUME" INAUGURAL BALL!!!

BRUCE McCALL

More To-Do's: (a) Run check to see if invite to fill in for Bill C. in addressing Narcolepsy Convention another Bill C. "leg-pull." All kidding aside, remind Bill C. at tomorrow's Cabinet meeting that narcolepsy causes more lost workdays in U.S. labor force annually than shingles and Bell's palsy *combined.* (A.G. chairs blue-ribbon commission?) "I want to be remembered as your Narcolepsy President"? (b) Get out more of the real A.G. story; e.g., A.G. has never had a parking ticket, A.G. washes hands one hundred times daily, A.G. has complete collection of *National Geographics.* (c) Stress weather in Meteorological Roundtable appearance next week. Weather talk my favorite!

Bill C. "getting on my nerves" just a little teeny bit. What's so dad-blamed funny about "the way Al moves his arms" that he had to show the Russian Foreign Minister in front of me? Must be some private joke. (Practice hand and arm gestures in mirror.)

Called Hillary "Hipper" at the luncheon today. Pretended to stare holes through me. Brrr! Wild notion: Wear saffron robe gift from California gang to church on Sunday—nice ecumenical-inclusion symbol. Or is A.G. once again being too "leading edge"? That reminds me, have to lecture Pope next visit on Italian petrochemical industry's need for tighter smokestack and water-pollution regulations.

Stop saying I invented tornadoes. Must lecture staff on difference between tornadoes and cyclones. Q: Can Quayle spell "Tennessee"? Perfect debate squelch! Who says A.G. not witmeister?

Use Bill C.'s H'wood pals to get to Sinatra—great headline act for mildew-research benefit cookout! ("Remember to wear chef hat at rakish angle"—note from Bill C. Can you say "micromanaging"???) Actually, studies show that micromanaging may be part of the answer for many of the technological challenges ahead, especially in the microbiogenetic sector. Work up lecture for next week's Cabinet meeting.

Seating plan for State's Canada Day dinner next week has me standing *outside* Gold Room! Silly mixups like that won't happen when A.G. is President!

"I *don't* want to be remembered as your Swine Flu Epidemic President." Nice twist! ♦

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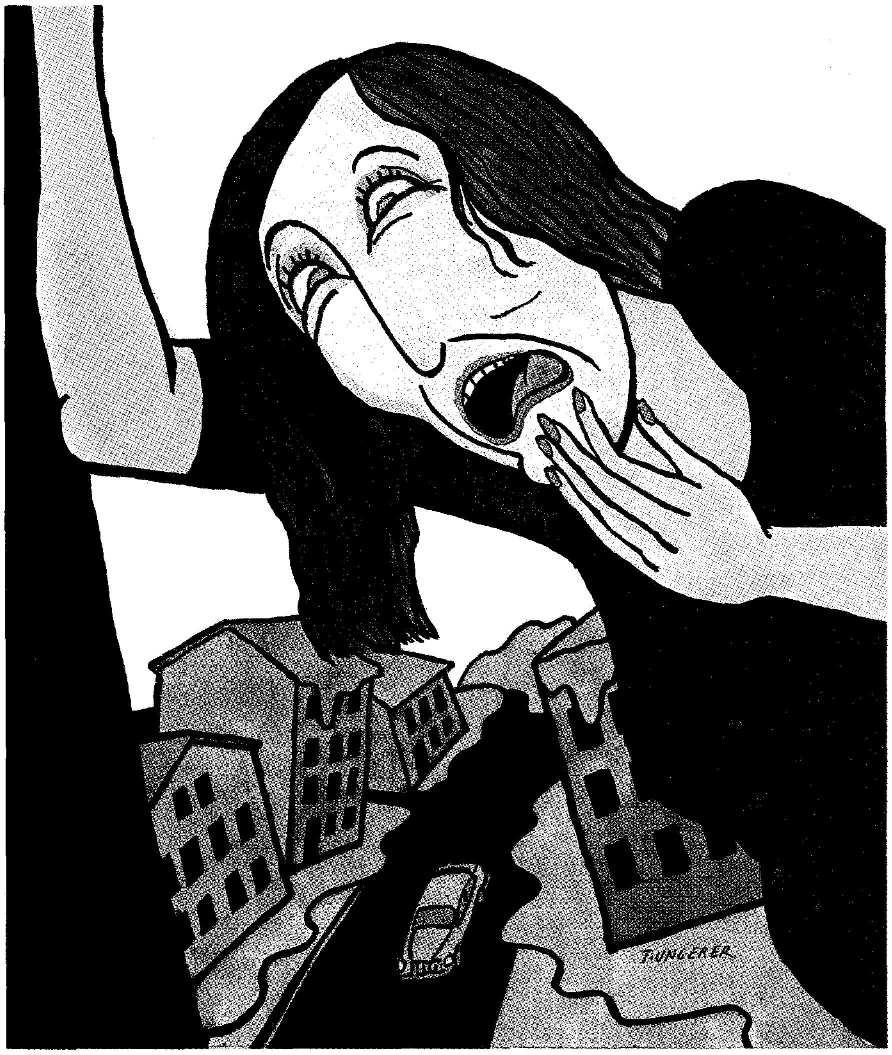
MEDICAL DISPATCH

A QUEASY FEELING

Why can't we cure nausea?

BY ATUL GAWANDE



TOMI UNGERER

IN the beginning, the nausea didn't seem anything to worry about. Amy Fitzpatrick was eight weeks pregnant—with twins, as an ultrasound had revealed—and, having watched her sister and her friends go through their pregnancies, she understood that nausea was simply part of the deal. Her first episode was certainly inconvenient, though. She was on New York's F.D.R. Drive, piloting her Honda Civic to work through the frantic rush of morning traffic. Speeding along at fifty miles per hour, she realized that she was about to throw up.

Fitzpatrick was twenty-nine years old, tall, with long, thick black hair set against pale Irish skin and a dimpled, almost teen-age face that sometimes made it hard for people to take her seriously, despite her Wharton M.B.A. She lived in Manhattan, where her husband was an investment banker, and she commuted to Manhassett, on Long Island, where she worked as a management consultant for the North Shore Health System. It was a brisk March morning, and she needed to find somewhere to pull over fast.

As she got off the F.D.R. onto the ramp to the Triborough Bridge, her head was swimming and her stomach was roiling. She was in what scientists call the "prodromal phase of emesis."

Salivation increases, sometimes torrentially. The pupils dilate. The heart begins to race. The blood vessels in the skin constrict, increasing pallor—NASA scientists have even used skin sensors to detect space sickness in astronauts, who have sometimes been reluctant to admit experiencing nausea. People break out in a cold sweat. Fatigue and often drowsiness occur in minutes. Attention, reflexes, and concentration wane.

While all this is going on, the stomach develops abnormal electrical activity, which prevents it from emptying and causes it to relax. The esophagus contracts, pulling the upper portion of the stomach from the abdomen, through the diaphragm, and into the chest, forming a kind of funnel from stomach to esophagus. Then, in a single movement, known as the "retrograde giant contraction," the upper small intestine evacuates its contents backward into the stomach in preparation for vomiting. In the lower small intestine, smaller rhythmic contractions push the contents into the colon.

As Fitzpatrick came off the exit ramp, the lanes opened out like a fan, and all the drivers around her jockeyed for position. She looked for a place to pull over on the right side of the road, but there wasn't any. She started to cut across the lanes to the left, aiming for a no man's land between the traffic going into the toll booths and the traffic coming out from the other direction. She began to retch, and she fished out an empty plastic grocery bag. Then she vomited. Some of the vomit hit the sleeveless dress and navy Ann Taylor jacket she wore. Some got into the bag she held with one hand. She kept her eyes open and kept the car steady, though, and made it out of the traffic. Then she braked to a halt, bent forward against her shoulder belt, and brought up whatever she had left.

The vomiting act itself has two phases. The retching phase involves a few rounds of coördinated contractions of the abdominal muscles, the diaphragm, and the muscles of respiratory inspiration. So far, nothing has come out. In the "expulsive" phase, the diaphragm and the abdomen undergo a massive, prolonged contraction, generating intense pressure in the stomach; when the esophagus relaxes, it's as if someone had taken the plug off a fire hydrant.

Vomiting usually makes people feel better, at least for a little while, but Fitzpatrick didn't feel any better. She sat there with the cars rushing by, waiting for the sick feeling to pass, but it didn't. Eventually, still queasy, she drove over the bridge, turned the car around, went home, and climbed into bed. Over the next few days, she began to lose her appetite, and strong odors became intolerable. Easter came that weekend, and she and her husband, Bob, drove down to Alexandria, Virginia, to see her family. She was barely able to tolerate the ride, and had to spend it lying flat on the back seat. It would be months before she could make it back to New York.

At her parents' home, her symptoms rapidly escalated. That weekend, she was unable to hold down any food or liquid at all. She became thoroughly dehydrated. The Monday after Easter, she spent a few hours at the hospital and got replenished with intravenous fluid. She saw her mother's obstetrician, who reassured her that nausea and vomiting were normal during pregnancy, and gave her some common, practical advice: stay away from strong odors and cold liquids, and try to get down small amounts of food whenever possible—perhaps dry crackers and other carbohydrates. Since Fitzpatrick's symptoms were normal, the doctor didn't want to consider prescribing drugs. Pregnancy sickness, she pointed out, usually goes away by the fourteenth, at most the sixteenth, week of pregnancy.

Fitzpatrick was determined, but she found that she couldn't tolerate anything except a bite of cracker or toast. By the end of the week, she needed more hydration, and the doctor arranged for a visiting nurse to come to her parents' house and administer I.V. fluids. Fitzpatrick continually felt that she was on the verge of throwing up. She had been someone who could eat almost anything; now the smell of the blandest foods made her gag. She had always loved stomach-churning amusement-park rides; now riding in a car or just standing up or tilting her head brought on severe motion sickness. She couldn't make it down the stairs. Even in bed, watching TV or focussing on a magazine made her head reel. Over the next couple of weeks, she would vomit five or six times a day. She lost twelve pounds instead of gaining weight, as a woman

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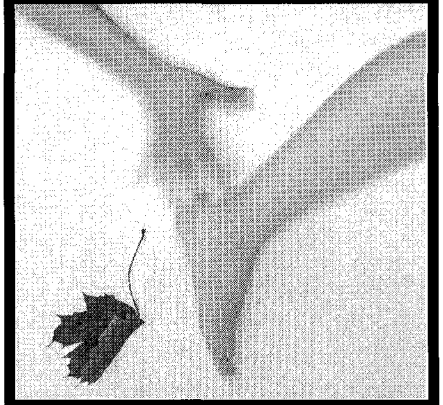

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bearing twins should have. The worst of it was the sense that she was losing control of her life. The management executive in her couldn't stand it. Here she was, back in the house she had grown up in. Her mother had to take a leave from teaching high school to care for her. She felt as if she were a helpless child.

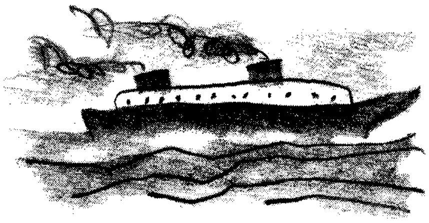
WHAT is nausea, this strange and awful beast? The subject gets little attention in medical school, and yet, after pain, nausea is the most frequent complaint for which people consult physicians. It is a typical side effect of drugs. Among surgery patients, vomiting after anesthesia is so common that an "emesis basin" is kept at the side of every bed in the recovery room. A majority of chemotherapy patients suffer nausea, and they consistently rank it as the worst part of the treatment. From sixty to eighty-five per cent of pregnant women experience morning sickness or "pregnancy sickness," and a third of those who are employed miss work as a result of it. In about five in a thousand pregnant women, the condition is so severe as to cause substantial weight loss—a condition termed "hyperemesis of pregnancy." And, of course, motion sickness afflicts virtually all of us at some point in our lives. Seasickness has been a major military concern dating back to ancient Greece. (The word "nausea" comes from the Greek word for ship.) Cybersickness continues to hobble the development of virtual-reality devices. And space sickness is a frequent, though rarely mentioned, problem for astronauts.

The most striking thing about nausea is that it is so intensely aversive (Cicero claimed he "would rather be killed than again suffer the tortures of seasickness"), and not just in the moment. Long after the pain of childbirth fades from memory, mothers will vividly recall their experience of nausea; it is even a reason that some women don't want to bear more children. Nausea is remarkable in this way. Break a leg on a ski slope and—as bad as traumatic pain can be—once you can, you'll ski again. After one unfortunate experience with a bottle of gin or an oyster, by contrast, people won't go near the culprit for years. In Anthony Burgess's "A Clockwork Orange," the authorities programmed Alex away from brutality by coupling his violent urges with feelings of nausea, not of pain. At one time, some German towns made similar efforts. An 1843 manuscript relates that delinquent juveniles used to be put inside a box outside town hall, whereupon a policeman spun the box around at high speed until the youths had provided the gathered crowd with a "disgusting spectacle."

The sheer loathsomeness of nausea and vomiting does seem to serve a biological purpose. The benefit of vomiting after eating something poisonous or tainted is obvious: the toxin is expelled. And the dreadfulness of the accompanying nausea deters you from ever wanting to eat anything like it again. This explains why pills, chemotherapy, and general anesthetics so often cause nausea and vomiting: they are poisons—albeit controlled ones—and the body is designed to reject them.

Why other things cause nausea and vomiting is more difficult to explain, but scientists are beginning to see some sense in nature's design. You'd think that pregnancy sickness, for example, would be evolutionarily disadvantageous, since a growing embryo needs nutrition. In a famous 1992 paper, however, the evolutionary biologist Margie Profet made a compelling case that pregnancy sickness is actually protective. She pointed out that natural foods that are safe for adults commonly turn out to be unsafe for embryos. All plants produce toxins, and in order to be able to eat them we have evolved elaborate detoxification systems. But these systems don't eliminate harmful chemicals completely, and embryos can be sensitive to even tiny amounts. (For example, toxins in potatoes have been found to cause neural malformations in animal fetuses, even at levels that are nontoxic to their mothers; indeed, Ireland's heavy potato consumption may account for its having the world's highest rate of neural defects, such as spina bifida.)

Pregnancy sickness, Profet suggested, may have evolved to reduce an embryo's exposure to natural toxins. She pointed out that women with pregnancy sickness strongly prefer bland foods that do not spoil easily (like breads and cereals) and are particularly averse to foods associated with high levels of natural toxins, such as bitter or pungent foods and animal products that are not extremely fresh. The theory also explains why sickness occurs mainly during the first trimester. That is when the embryo develops organs and is most sensitive to toxins; at the same time, it is small and its calorie needs are easily supplied by the mother's fat stores. Over all, women with moderate to severe morning sickness have a lower rate of miscarriages than women with mild nausea or none at all.



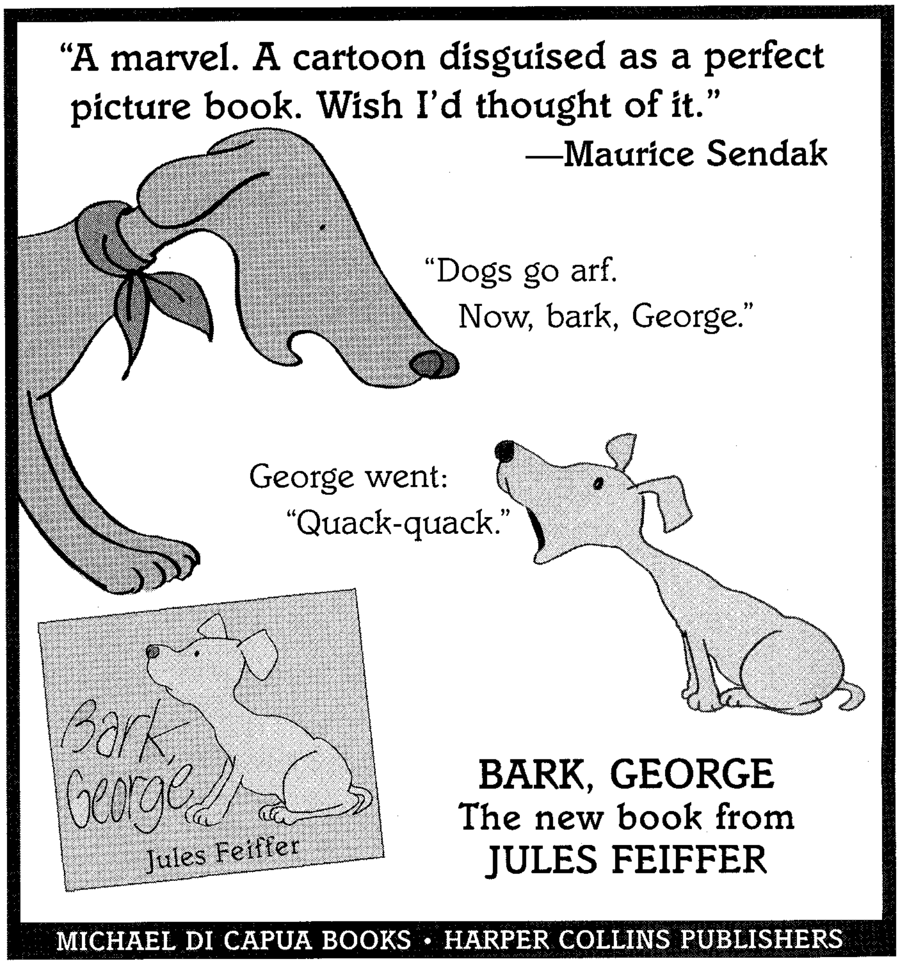
The purpose of motion sickness is harder to account for. In 1882, the psychologist William James discovered that certain deaf people were immune to seasickness, and since then a great deal of attention has been focussed on the role of the vestibular system—the inner-ear components that enable us to track our position in space. Scientists came to believe that vigorous motion overstimulates this system, producing signals in the brain that trigger nausea and vomiting. But as Charles Oman, an M.I.T. aerospace physiologist, points out, this theory could not explain many characteristics of motion sickness: why activities like running, jumping, or dancing almost never produce sickness, whereas motion that isn't under your control—for example, being flung around the Gravitron at the county fair—does; why drivers of cars or pilots of aircraft are much less susceptible than passengers; and why sickness tends to diminish with experience. Motion sickness can occur without any motion at all—as with cybersickness or, a related phenomenon, "cinerama sickness," which comes from watching very wide-screen movies. Oman found that among the most provocative stimuli for space sickness in astronauts is simply seeing another astronaut float by upside down, which can produce a sudden, nauseating perception that you are the one who is upside down.

Researchers have now established that motion sickness occurs when there is a conflict between the motion we experience and the motion we expect to experience. Merely to balance our heads on our shoulders, our bodies on our hips and feet, we require an incredibly fine-tuned "body sense"—a system that learns to anticipate motion based on input from vision, muscles, and, especially, the inner ear. Nausea arises when the brain receives unanticipated sensory inputs—for someone new to boats, say, feeling the ground beneath him pitch up and down, or, for someone in a virtual-reality helmet, seeing oneself move through the world while one's body knows it is standing still. (Taking the wheel of a vehicle helps, because one can have more control and feel for how one is moving.) To put it simply, motion sickness is really sickness from unfamiliar motion.

But why does unfamiliar motion make us feel so miserable? A leading explanation returns to the notion of nausea and vomiting as something that protects against toxins. During the Pleistocene epoch, when our species evolved, people had no occasion to experience sustained passive motion, as they do today, on a boat or in a car. Such sensations, it seems, were most likely to have occurred from the ingesting of some kind of brain toxin. So motion sickness may be a modern by-product of our standard system for expelling poisons and nurturing avoidance of them. This theory is not nearly as well examined as the explanation for pregnancy sickness, however. And we still don't have a convincing explanation of why anxiety or the sight of blood or of vomit itself should make people sick.

However adaptive nausea and vomiting might be, in cases of hyperemesis like Amy Fitzpatrick's these reflexes seem to spin out of control. Indeed, prior to the Second World War and the development of modern techniques for replacing fluids, hyperemesis was routinely fatal unless the pregnancy was aborted. Even today, although death is rare, serious complications from the severe vomiting can occur—including rupture of the esophagus, lung collapse, and tearing of the spleen. No one would suggest that Fitzpatrick's condition was in the least beneficial. Something had to be done to help her.

ONCE Fitzpatrick had lost twelve pounds, her doctor prescribed drugs for her in an effort to control the nausea and vomiting and allow her to eat and drink again. First, the doctor



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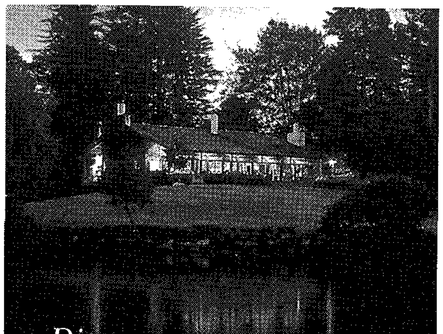

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tried Reglan, a drug often used to treat nausea from general anesthesia. Fitzpatrick wore a device that pumped the drug into her leg around the clock. It didn't seem to help, though; instead, it produced frightening neurological side effects—tremors, lockjaw, body rigidity, and difficulty breathing. The doctor tried a second drug, Compazine, which didn't do much of anything, and then still another, Phenergan suppositories, which made her drowsy but didn't slow the vomiting.

All of those drugs work by blocking dopamine receptors in the brain. There is, however, a more recent class of anti-emetics on the market today, serotonin-receptor blockers, and these have been hailed as a breakthrough in the treatment of nausea and vomiting. They aren't cheap—Zofran, the biggest seller, costs a hundred and twenty-five dollars a day or more—but studies show that they substantially reduce vomiting in chemotherapy patients and also in some surgery patients. Nor have any problems with birth defects been detected. So Fitzpatrick was given Zofran by vein for several weeks, but, once again, to no avail.

Her doctor also arranged for blood tests, ultrasounds, and consultations with numerous specialists. Nausea can signify an obstruction of the gastrointestinal tract, or a severe infection, or poisoning. But no alternative cause could be found.

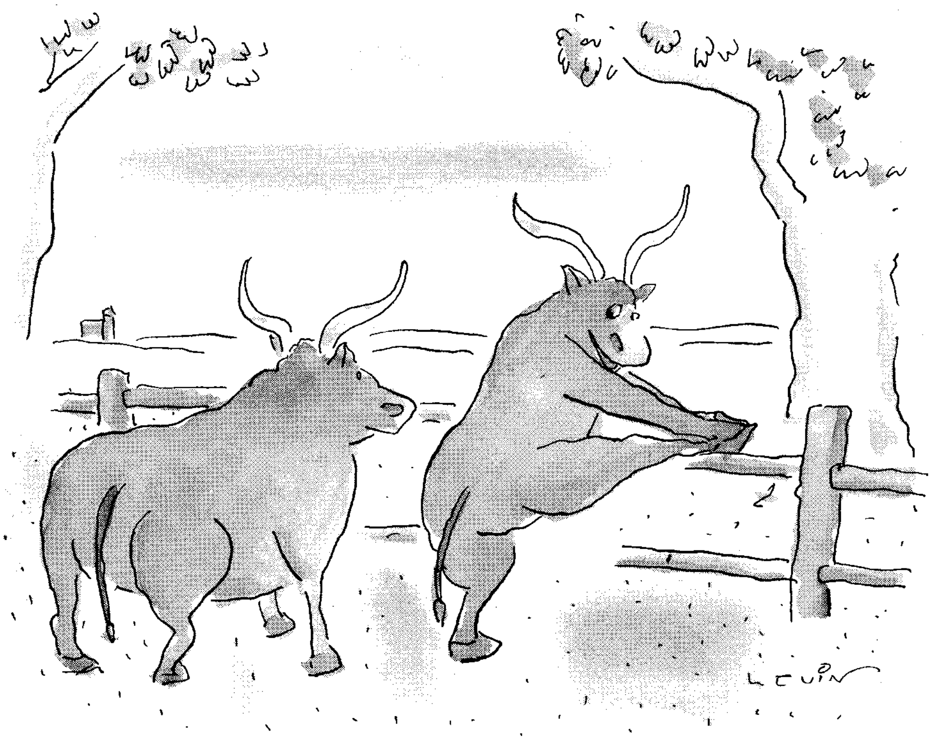
"I know the doctors are trying their best," Fitzpatrick would say, and she tried her best, too. She just had to hang in there, she told herself, and, ever the M.B.A., she was organized about it. She arranged for a supply of plastic kidney-shaped emesis basins to be stationed at strategic points around the house, and for a suction apparatus with a plastic nozzle to be kept at her bedside for vacuuming all the sickly saliva from her mouth. For the most part, though, when she wasn't bent over, vomiting, she just lay in bed with her eyes closed.

Meanwhile, a small committee of family and friends systematically gathered information on treatment options, both conventional and otherwise. At various points, Fitzpatrick tried herbal therapy, Chinese massage, and water with lemon in it. She tried ginger after she learned about a study showing that it might be effective for her condition. She tried Sea-Bands, which are acupressure wristbands that apply constant pressure at the "Neiguan point"—a spot on the inside of each forearm situated three finger-widths down from the wrist crease, between the tendons. (Though acupressure has been touted for nausea resulting from pregnancy, chemotherapy, and motion, studies have not revealed any consistent effect.) None of it reduced Fitzpatrick's nausea, although she did enjoy the massages.

Even more disturbing, the symptoms weren't getting better with time, as her doctors had expected. By the fourth month of pregnancy, she was as nauseated as she had ever been—an exceedingly unusual occurrence. She looked frighteningly ill. Her weight was down sixteen pounds. Her doctor admitted her to the George Washington University Hospital and had her seen by the high-risk obstetrics service. She was put on intravenous nutrition and she finally started gaining weight. During the next few months, however, she spent more time in the hospital than out.

To her doctors, she was now a spectral, ever-present reminder of failure—the kind of patient whose very existence is a reproach to them and their expertise. Doctors have several ways of dealing with these patients, and in the course of events she must have seen all of them. Some doctors kept telling her that in another week or two she'd turn the corner. One doctor asked if she wanted to go back to New York, and she got the distinct impression that he just wanted to get rid of her. Another seemed to believe that she wasn't trying hard enough to eat, as if the nausea were under her control. Their frustration was palpable. Later, they suggested that she see a psychiatrist. This was not an unreasonable suggestion. Anxiety and stress can influence nausea, and she was willing to try anything that might help. But Fitzpatrick says that the psychiatrist who saw her kept focussing on whether she was angry at the babies and unable to accept her roles as wife and mother. A surprising number of doctors still believe in the discredited Freudian theory that hyperemesis is due to an unconscious rejection of pregnancy.

The situation had moved beyond the



"I'm thinking of doing Pamplona this year."

doctors' control and, worse, their understanding. Naturally, Fitzpatrick sought to gain a measure of control herself. At one point, she and her family pushed her team to try a treatment they had come across in an article about Maria Shriver's experience with hyperemesis. The treatment involved a continuous infusion of droperidol, a tranquilizer that is often used to reduce nausea and vomiting in surgery patients. The doctors agreed to try it. During the infusion, however, Fitzpatrick's condition actually worsened. She started throwing up every ten minutes, developed small tears in her esophagus, and began bringing up blood by the cupful.

Her suffering was bottomless. It is not uncommon in hyperemesis cases for women to abort the pregnancy because of the unrelieved misery. A woman across the hall from her did abort because of hyperemesis, and the doctors proposed the same option for Fitzpatrick. She did not consider it, partly because she was an observant Catholic and partly because each day the nurse came by with a small ultrasound device that allowed her to hear the two tiny hearts fluttering inside her womb. Somehow, that was enough to keep her going.

THERE is no universal antiemetic. Skin patches containing the drug scopolamine reduce motion sickness and postoperative vomiting but seem to do little for pregnant women or chemotherapy patients. The dopamine-receptor antagonist Phenergan works well for many pregnant women and motion-sickness sufferers but not for chemotherapy patients. Even a cutting-edge drug, like Zofran, which is often seen as a kind of penicillin for nausea, frequently doesn't help. While Zofran can be highly effective against vomiting from chemotherapy and anesthesia, studies show that it doesn't help with motion sickness or hyperemesis of pregnancy. (Smoking marijuana, by the way, appears to be effective for chemotherapy patients, if only weakly, but in pregnancy it is as toxic for the fetus as tobacco is.)

This makes sense when you recall that nausea is a condition that can be triggered by stimuli as different as an unfamiliar motion, a bad smell, a toxic drug, and the hormonal fluctuations of pregnancy. As scientists explain it, the brain has a vomiting program (or "module") that receives and responds to all kinds of inputs: from chemoreceptors in the nose, the gut, and the brain; from receptors that detect overfilling of the stomach or tickling of the uvula; from motion sensors in the inner ear; and from higher brain centers governing memory, mood, and cognition. Each of our current drugs presumably interferes with some pathways more than with others. Hence the different effects in different conditions.

What's more, although we often think of nausea and vomiting as part of the same phenomenon, they are quite separate, probably involving separate programs in the brain, and a drug that affects one may not affect the other. Vomiting does not always involve nausea. I can remember a kid in sixth grade who could vomit at will—no finger down the throat or anything—even though he didn't feel the least bit sick. And people with the rare condition known as rumination syndrome have an unexplained tendency to vomit food up from their stomach into their mouth shortly after every meal—this without any associated nausea. (They either swallow the food again or spit it out, "depending on social circumstances," as one scientific article put it.) Conversely, even severe nausea does not necessarily produce vomiting. And drugs that stop vomiting do not necessarily stop nausea—a point that many doctors and nurses often fail to recognize. For example, people working in medicine have been highly impressed by Zofran, but patients may be less so. A forthcoming study led by the nausea researcher Gary Morrow, of the University of Rochester Medical School, found that widespread use of Zofran and its cousins had reduced vomiting in chemotherapy patients but had produced no improvement in the severity of their nausea. In fact, patients today report having a longer duration of nausea than patients had during the pre-Zofran years.

Researchers studying chemotherapy patients—a sort of captive population for scientists investigating how nausea and vomiting occur—have discovered something even more surprising. These patients actually experience three separate types of nausea and vomiting. An "acute" type occurs within minutes to hours of receiving a dose of a toxic chemotherapy drug and then gradually resolves—exactly the effect we'd predict from a poison. But then in many patients the nausea and vomiting come back after a day or two, an effect called "delayed emesis." And about a quarter of chemotherapy patients even begin to have "anticipatory nausea and vomiting," symptoms that occur before the drugs are injected. Morrow has documented some striking characteristics of these types of nausea. The more intense the initial acute nausea, the worse the anticipatory nausea becomes. And the more cycles of chemotherapy that patients receive, the more general the cues for anticipatory nausea become: vomiting may occur first when a patient sees the nurse who administers the drugs, then when he sees any nurse or takes in the smell of the clinic, then when he pulls into the clinic parking lot for his chemotherapy appointment. Morrow had one patient who vomited whenever she saw the highway exit sign for the hospital.

These reactions are, of course, familiar results of psychological conditioning—the "Clockwork Orange" effect in action. Such conditioning probably plays an important role in prolonging nausea in other circumstances, including pregnancy. Once delayed or anticipatory vomiting develops, though, current drugs don't help. Studies by Morrow and others have found that only behavioral treatments, like hypnosis or deep relaxation techniques, significantly reduce conditioned vomiting, and then only for some patients.

Ultimately, our medical arsenal against nausea and vomiting is still fairly primitive. Given how common these problems are and how much people are willing to pay to make them go away, pharmaceutical companies are investing millions of dollars in efforts to find more effective drugs. Recently, Merck has developed a promising contender, currently known as MK-869. This is one of a new class of agents, called "substance-P antagonists." These drugs attracted a good deal of attention when Merck announced that they seemed to be clinically effective against depression. Less noted, however, were findings published this winter in *The New England Journal of Medicine* that MK-869 was remarkably effective against nausea and vomiting in chemotherapy patients.

The findings were unusual for two reasons. First, the drug substantially reduced both acute and delayed vomiting. Second, MK-869 didn't just work against vomiting but reduced nausea as well. The proportion of patients reporting anything more than minimal nausea in the five days following chemotherapy dropped from seventy-five per cent to fifty-one per cent with the drug.

All our medications have their limitations, however, and, as promising as such new drugs may seem they will fail many patients. Not even MK-869 could stop nausea for half of the chemotherapy patients. (In addition, its safety and effectiveness in pregnant women are likely to remain unknown for some time. Because of both medical and legal hazards, drug companies generally avoid testing drugs on pregnant women.) So there's no morphine for nausea on the horizon. Uncontrolled nausea remains a persistent problem. Still, a brand-new clinical specialty called "palliative medicine" is pursuing a radical project: the scientific study of suffering. And what's striking is that they're finding solutions where others have not.

PALLIATIVE specialists are experts in the care of dying patients—specifically in improving the quality of their lives rather than prolonging their lives. One might think we wouldn't need a specialty for this, but there's evidence that these specialists really are better at it. Dying patients often have pain. Many have nausea. Some have such poor lung function that, although they take in enough oxygen to survive, they live with a constant, terrifying breathlessness—a feeling that they are drowning and just cannot get enough air. These are patients with untreatable disease, and yet palliative specialists have been remarkably successful at helping them. The key is simply that they take suffering seriously, as a problem in itself. In medicine, we're used to seeing such symptoms only as clues in a puzzle about where the disease is and what we can do about it. And, as a rule, fixing what's physically wrong—taking out the infected appendix, setting the broken bone, treating the pneumonia—is precisely the way to relieve suffering. (I wouldn't be a surgeon if I thought otherwise.) But not always—and nowhere is this more apparent than with nausea. Most of the time, nausea is not a sign of pathology but a normal response to something like travel or pregnancy—or even to a beneficial treatment like chemotherapy or antibiotics or general anesthesia. The patient, we say, is "fine," but the suffering is no less.

Consider the significance of vital signs. When a patient is in the hospital, every four hours or so a nurse records the vital signs on a bedside chart to provide caregivers with a measure of how the patient is doing over time. This is done the same way the world over. By convention, the four vital signs are temperature, blood pressure, pulse, and respiratory rate. And these do tell us a lot about whether someone is getting phys-

IN THE DUNES

When you close your eyes in such a silence, death
could come up behind you like an old friend
on tiptoe and touch you and that's that, goodbye
the world. I keep my eyes shut fast in this pure nothing
where the sand and hedges are still in no wind at all
(almost a miracle on this sea-surrounded tip of things)
and hear nothing at first, nothing, and then—as if
out of the egg of silence—small sounds hatching:
thin fluting of a goldfinch, the song sparrow's single note
of warning, in the distance a hawk's cry broken off,
crackle of one twig slipping free of another, the tide's
perpetual faint susurrus—no end to its run-on sentence—
and that dry whisper as the sand in sleep keeps shifting.

—EAMON GRENNAN

ically better or worse. But they don't tell us anything about suffering, about something more than just how the body is doing. Palliative specialists are trying to change this. They want to make pain—the level of discomfort a patient reports—the fifth vital sign. The fuss they've raised is forcing physicians to recognize how often we undertreat pain. And they are developing better treatment strategies generally. For example, it is now evident that, once symptoms of severe nausea (or, for that matter, pain) develop and progress, they become increasingly resistant to therapies of any kind. The best approach, palliative specialists have learned, is to start treatment when the symptoms are mild—or, in some circumstances, even before they appear—and that proves true whether you're a passenger about to board a ship or a cancer patient about to start chemotherapy. (The American Society of Clinical Oncology is soon to announce guidelines endorsing this preventive approach for chemotherapy patients.) Back when doctors didn't hesitate to prescribe antiemetics for ordinary pregnancy sickness—at least a third of pregnant women were on such drugs in the nineteen-sixties and seventies—hyperemesis was much less common. But doctors changed this practice after lawsuits forced the popular remedy Bendectin off the market (despite numerous studies showing no evidence of harm). It became standard to avoid prescribing drugs until, as in Fitzpatrick's case, vomiting had already caused significant dehydration or starvation. Hospital admissions for hyperemesis of pregnancy subsequently tripled.

Perhaps the most striking observation palliative specialists make, however, is that there is a distinction between symptom and suffering. As the physician Eric J. Cassell points out in his book "The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine," for some patients simply receiving a measure of understanding—of knowing what the source of the misery is, seeing its meaning in a different way, or just coming to accept that we cannot always tame nature—can be enough to control their suffering. A doctor can still help, even when medications have failed.

Amy Fitzpatrick said that the doctors she liked best were the few who admitted they didn't know how to explain her nausea or what to do about it. They would say that they had never seen anything like her case, and she could tell that they commiserated with her. She did acknowledge having some contradictory feelings about such admissions. At times, they made her wonder if she had the right doctors, if, somehow, they were missing something. But, for all the treatments she and the doctors tried, the nausea would not let up. It really did seem beyond anyone's comprehension.

The first months were a terrible, frightening struggle. Gradually, though, she felt a transformation, a toughening of her spirit, and she sometimes even had a thought that things were not so bad after all. She prayed every day and believed that the two children growing inside her were a gift from God, and, with time, she came to see her trials as simply the price she had to pay for this remarkable joy. She gave up looking for silver bullets. After the twenty-sixth week of pregnancy, she asked for no more experimental therapies. The nausea and the vomiting persisted, but she would not be defeated by them.

Eventually, there was a glimmer of relief. By the thirtieth week, she found that she could eat an odd selection of four things in sliver-size portions: steak, asparagus, tuna, and mint ice cream. And she was able to hold down a protein drink. The nausea remained, but it had eased just a bit. In the thirty-third week, seven weeks early, Fitzpatrick went into active labor. Her husband flew down on the shuttle from LaGuardia in time for the delivery. The doctors warned her that the twins would be small, around three pounds, but on September 12th, at 10:52 P.M., Linda was born, weighing four pounds twelve ounces, and at 10:57 P.M. Jack was born, at five pounds even—both in excellent health.

Shortly after delivery, Fitzpatrick threw up once more. "But that was the last time," she recalled. The next morning, she drank a big glass of orange juice. And that night she ate a giant hamburger with blue cheese and fries. "It was delicious," she said. ♦

Board Editor Timothy Foote last wrote on America's westward rush in 1846.—*Smithsonian.*

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

A TOUCH OF BAD

Why is the director Neil LaBute so interested in jerks?

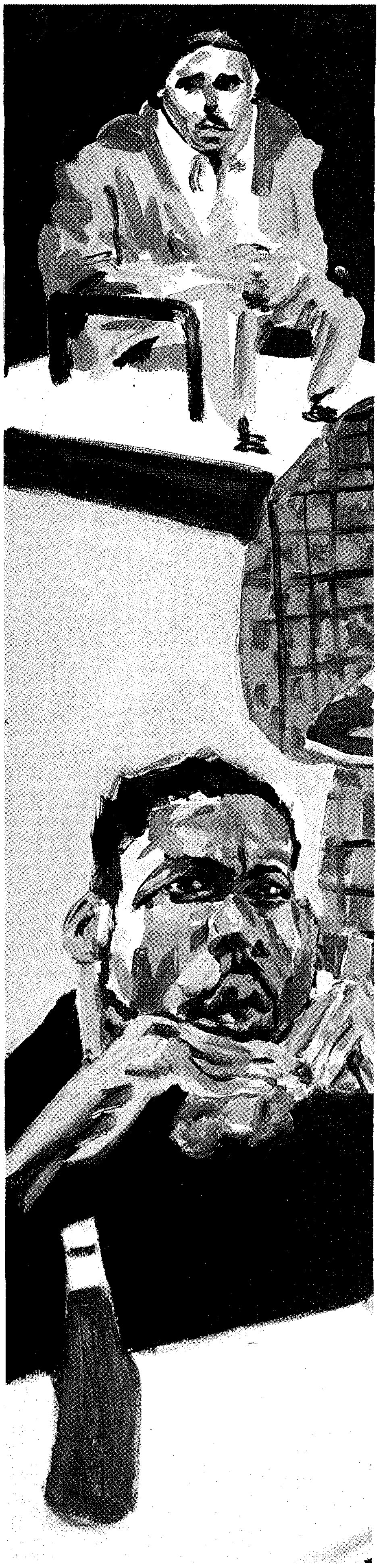
BY JOHN LAHR

ONCE upon a time in the early nineties, in the irony-free zone of Off Off Broadway, the writer and director Neil LaBute sat onstage doing triple duty as an actor in his barroom play, "Filthy Talk for Troubled Times: Scenes of Intolerance." One of the barflies was in the middle of a riff about AIDS and about her fear of infection—"I say, put them all in a fucking pot and boil them . . . just as a precaution"—when a member of the audience sitting right up front shouted, "Kill the playwright!" LaBute, who is thirty-eight and whose wiry black hair and pug nose give him the look of a large, amiable hedgehog, says his first thought was "to get to the exit, to lead the crowd out to safety"; another part of him was thrilled, because "people were listening enough to go out of their way to make a response." The angry patron stayed for the rest of the play, which is a testament to LaBute's good writing and to his canny view of theatre and film as "a contact sport," which "should be the most of whatever it is—the most joy, the most terror."

LaBute, whose first play-turned-film, "In the Company of Men" (1997), made his name and also earned him the sobriquet "the angriest white male," courts provocation not for the sake of shock but to make an audience think against its own received opinions. His production company is mischievously called Contemptible Entertainment; his work is cruel, dark, and often very funny. "In the Company of Men" is about two corporate eager beavers—the venomous Chad and his sidekick, Howard—who conspire to find a vulnerable woman, woo her, and then hurt her. "It's a simple story," LaBute wrote in the introduction to the published screenplay. "Boys meet girl, boys crush girl, boys giggle." "Your Friends and Neighbors" (1998), adapted from his play "Lepers," is a sexual merry-go-round among friends. Together, the two films are a kind of "Rake's Progress," and LaBute's model for them is Restoration comedy, which, as he explained to me when we met in Hollywood this spring, "gets down to the dirt of the way we live with each other and treat each other." He pays homage to his source in "Your Friends and Neighbors" when, during a rehearsal of Wycherley's "The Country Wife," the drama professor and sleazy sexual predator, Jerry (Ben Stiller), sitting in the auditorium in periwig and frock coat, explains to his cuckolded best friend, Barry (Aaron Eckhart), why he bedded his wife:

JERRY: . . . I just feel . . . Fuck, I don't know how to put this, I just feel . . .
BARRY: "Bad"?
JERRY: "Bad." Exactly! Bad.
BARRY: I mean, my wife . . .
JERRY: I'm sorry.
BARRY: The same hotel room even.
JERRY: I am sorry.
BARRY: Yeah . . .
JERRY: But I . . . I mean, I still feel . . .
BARRY: . . . "Bad."
JERRY: Right. "Bad."

The moral and emotional nonchalance of LaBute's characters echoes the amorality and privilege of the Restoration fops, who, LaBute has said, are "well-to-do people with time on their hands who go around hurting each other, doing things that are pretty unpleasant, just because the opportunity presents itself." The original court entertainments emphasized the notion of appearance versus authenticity. "Behind that great sense of costume—the wigs and makeup—there was a sense that all was well, even while bugs were crawling in the wigs and the physical self was falling apart," LaBute said. "There was still the sense that it was better to look good than to feel good." LaBute's contemporary fops have no authentic self to hide: they are all façade. He links this to the nineties



LaBute, center, with actors from "Bash" and "Nurse Betty": Ron Eldard, Paul Rudd, Calista Flockhart, Renée Zellweger, Morgan Freeman, and Chris Rock.

PHILIP BURKE

obsession with style and with the insistence on appearance as reality. "There's a huge sense in the nineties of 'I can become anything I want as long as I present it tenaciously enough.' Clinton would be a fair example."

LaBute, who calls himself "a part-time moralist," is a practicing Mormon; he converted to the faith in the early eighties, before he married Lisa Gore, a psychotherapist who is deeply involved with the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. The Mormon obsession with moral improvement and with "pretending nothing bad happens," as he says, accounts in large part for LaBute's relish of transgression. The absence of surface detail in his films—"In the Company of Men" takes place in a nameless city and at a nameless corporation where nameless executive tasks are performed—allows the viewer to focus on the psychological aspects of the piece: the casual cruelties we commit, the ways in which we displace our anger. "Neil always wants you to personalize his work," says the actor Aaron Eckhart, who starred in both "In the Company of Men" and "Your Friends and Neighbors," and has a part in the forthcoming "Nurse Betty," LaBute's first mainstream Hollywood movie and the only one of his films that he has not written. "He wants you to say, 'I'm that person' or 'I have done that.'"

For the same reasons, in his stage work LaBute favors the black box—the unadorned proscenium—and the confines of the monologue. His versatility in this form is shown to brilliant and unsettling effect in a trio of short pieces collectively called "Bash," which opened last week at the Douglas Fairbanks Theatre, starring Calista Flockhart, Ron Eldard, and Paul Rudd. Here, in one of the pieces—a tandem monologue entitled "A Gaggle of Saints: A Remembrance of Hatred and Longing"—a soon-to-be-married college couple recount a road trip to New York City with a few Mormon college friends for a party at the Plaza. During the day's long trajectory of good times, the guys find themselves attacking a homosexual in a Central Park latrine:

> Tim leans into him one more time, takes a little run at it, smashing his foot against the bridge of this man's nose and I see it give way. Just pick up and move to the other side of his face. Wow. And then it's silence. Not a sound. And for the first time, we look over at Dave.... What's he thinking? And right then, as if to answer us through revelation... he grabs up the nearest trash can, big wire mesh thing, raises it above his head as he whispers, "Fag." I'll never forget that... "fag." That's all. And brings that can down right on the spine of the guy, who just sort of shudders a bit, expelling air.

Clearly, LaBute does not follow the Mormon line about the showing of good. On the contrary, his work is built on the belief that great good can come from showing the bad.

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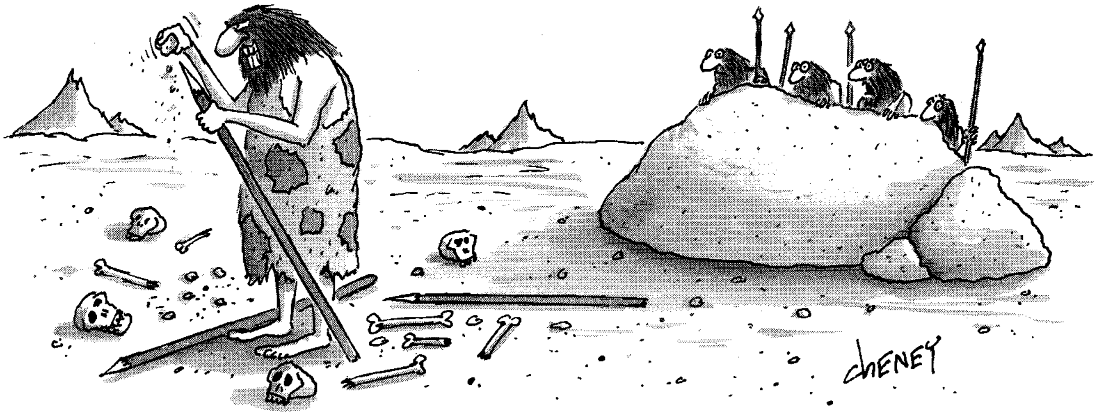
I VISITED LaBute on the set of "Nurse Betty," which he describes as "a feel-good hit that includes scalping, love, a cross-country car chase, shoot-outs, comedy"—in other words, an entertainment, and perhaps a holiday from his usual despair. LaBute, dressed in a blue-and-black plaid shirt, jeans, sneakers, and a slicker with a packet of raisins tucked into the cuff, spent much of the first morning skulking around a crowded Pasadena bungalow, inspecting every cranny of a room where one of the film's heavies, played by Chris Rock, goes looking for Betty, the title character (Renée Zellweger). The film is essentially a chase movie, in which Betty, a waitress, sees her ne'er-do-well husband murdered for the cache of drugs he has hidden in her car; traumatized and deluded, she sets off for Los Angeles to marry her "fiancé," the doctor on her favorite soap opera. On the set, LaBute engages his cast as he does the world—with an almost Presidential bonhomie, at once solicitous and standoffish. He speaks with the low-key collegial composure of someone who knows who he is—the boss. "Love that Tide!" he called to the set decorator, who was positioning the soap-powder box so that the camera would catch it in the corner of the frame. "Love that box of Tide!" The scene called for the actress Kathleen Wilhoite to hold a baby as she answered the front door; on this bright morning, the professional toddler, a hefty lump called Robert, was bawling himself red in the face. LaBute swooped up the child and cradled him in his thick arms, as adept at handling kids as adults. (He has an eleven-year-old daughter, Lily, and a seven-year-old son, Spencer.) "You'll have the baby in your arms. That'll give you an acting challenge," he said to Wilhoite. "It'll steal the scene," she said. LaBute shot her a grin as he walked away. "They often do," he said.



"O.K., so who gets to tell him he's a war criminal?"

• •

On the bungalow's front lawn, amid a scrum of technicians and prop hands, LaBute, an almost constant nosher, munched a few raisins. "My mom is very happy, because I'm doing more than she hoped for," he told me. "But she'd rather I was doing comedies. I told her, 'I just did, so wait till I do a drama.' "

Chris Rock ambled over, dressed like a Bible salesman, in a loose-fitting black suit. "He's great with scenery," Rock said. "He's the best hair director that ever lived." LaBute gave him an owlish look, greeted him as "Mr. Rock," and said they were nearly ready to shoot. "I don't smile in this movie. I brood," Rock said as he walked away. "Cheating America of the bullshit that is Chris Rock."

It is typical of LaBute that he would find a way to exploit Rock's edgy, darker essence rather than his show-biz surface, even in a commercial film. "Nurse Betty," written by John C. Richards and James Flamberg, is the first of a two-picture deal that LaBute cut with Propaganda Films (the company that joint-produced the four-million-dollar "Your Friends and Neighbors" last year). After he'd signed the contract, he had second thoughts and wanted to bolt; now he seemed to be contentedly and firmly at the helm. "There are a lot of firsts for me here," he said as the other children in the scene were being rounded up and given their orders. "First crane. First squib shot. First in all the things that you may not have dealt with—like anyone pulling a gun, let alone using it." To that list of firsts could be added: first big production (thirty million dollars), first seven-figure payday, first star-studded cast (Rock, Zellweger, Morgan Freeman), first happy ending, first film without his own narrative voice.

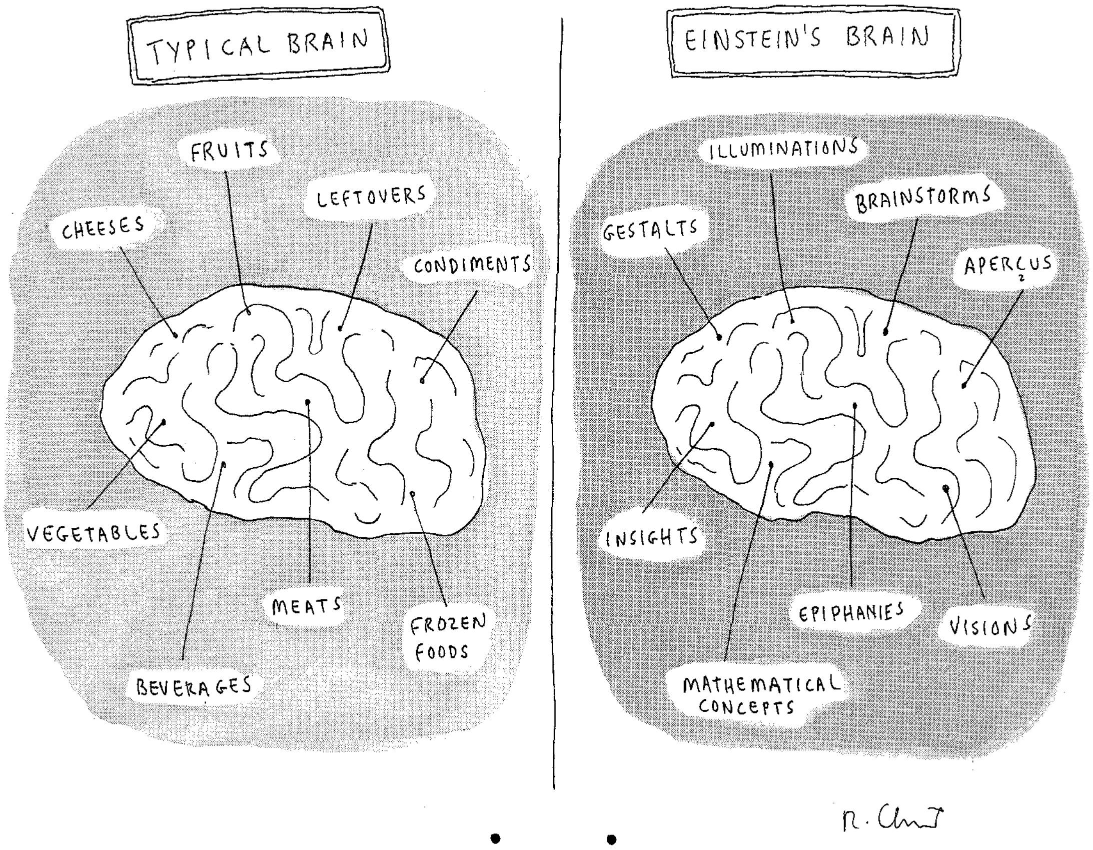
Even so, the Hollywood machine hasn't completely expunged LaBute's instinct for mischief, which became apparent a few hours later, when he was slumped in front of a monitor with two producers at his back worrying about the lack of coverage for an interracial sex scene. On the small screen, Rock was kneeling on a bed behind a white girl, pumping her for information while rogering her doggy style, as Jerry memorably does to Terri in "Your Friends and Neighbors." "This is why I wanted to do the script," LaBute joked. In fact, he said, he shot the scene without coverage on purpose, so it could not be edited, in the hope of finessing his case against the inbred conservatism of the studio. "We talked about the sex," he explained. "Frontal would have been too intimate—he's getting information from the girl. It seemed less personal from behind. They have the same amount of clothes on—in fact, more than they had on in 'Your Friends and Neighbors.' I think it comes down to the race thing. I really do."

After about ten minutes of calm discussion with the producers, LaBute accepted the postcoital option. "Just them in bed," he said. "Her sitting smoking. He's lying next to her, and they're talking." He shoved his fingers into a bag of Cheetos. "Let's do it!" he shouted to his assistant. "Light the bed. Let's look right down on them. And off we'll go. She'll blow a little smoke in his face."

The next day, the production caravan moved to a low-rent side street of downtown Los Angeles. "This is your 'I found the coke' scene. Your daddy will be proud of you," LaBute said to Rock. Rock started over toward his screen father, Morgan Freeman, who was sucking on a toothpick and looking like a Marlboro man, in cowboy boots and pressed jeans. By the time LaBute got the shot he was talking about, it was midday and a tent had been erected to protect the monitors from the glare of the sun. LaBute and his director of photography, Jean Yves Escoffier, watched the screens as Freeman and Rock, for about the tenth time, sauntered toward a parked LeSabre and pried its trunk open. "I shoulda been a film director when I was a kid," LaBute said, happy with the take. "Time would have gone by much quicker. Waiting for Christmas? Go make a movie."

LABUTE, who has an encyclopedic knowledge of pop culture and can as easily imitate Don Knotts ("My body is a weapon") as discourse on Werner Herzog's "Stroszek," is a curious amalgam of theatrical influences. "What the fuck's her name? I mean, tits like that must have a name, correct?" has the vernacular wallop of a David Mamet line; actually, it is the self-incriminating telephone talk of Cary in "Your Friends and Neighbors." LaBute writes with the same linguistic cunning as Mamet and characterizes his admiration for the playwright as "beyond fan—stalker perhaps. Psychological stalker." He even managed to mount an expurgated version of Mamet's "Sexual Perversity in Chicago" during his undergraduate days, at Brigham Young University: "My posters were so rococo that the passerby couldn't read what they said."

Where Mamet hears violence and evasion under conversational speech, LaBute hears a kind of moral and emo-



tional entropy—what he calls "the chill factor"—under his characters' jabbering. "I tend to hear a false sense of warmth in the way we lead people in sentences," LaBute says. " 'You know,' 'I mean,' 'Listen.' People are constantly trying to embellish what they say with this false sense of camaraderie—'I'm with you,' 'I'm with you on this.' A phrase that suddenly started coming up more and more and that I incorporated in 'Your Friends and Neighbors' was 'Is it me?' These men were constantly asking, without any sense of wanting to know the answer, 'Who's doing this?' "

In "Filthy Talk for Troubled Times" LaBute developed this idea by orchestrating a counterpoint of monologues in which people talk about wanting to connect while the form of the play insures that they aren't listening to each other. "Women. Fucking broads! . . . You can't fucking trust them," one drinker says to another. "Well . . . personally, I could never trust anything that bleeds for a week and doesn't die." The complete absence of empathy expressed by this vicious joke also finds a powerful metaphor at the end of "In the Company of Men," when the contrite Howard (Matt Malloy) goes in search of the female victim, Christine (Stacy Edwards), and finds her working in a bank. She wants no part of him or his apology; she leaves the bad feeling with him. "Listen," he says to her, then starts to shout when she doesn't acknowledge him. "Listen! Listen!! Listen!!! Listen!!!!" "It's so selfish," LaBute says of Howard's desire to have his impulse toward goodness acknowledged. "I think a lot of the characters I write, and certainly a lot of the male characters, are selfish. They just indulge themselves in taking care of their needs."

This sense of entitlement is the presenting symptom of most of LaBute's characters, and is part of what makes his work so distinctly contemporary. In addition to Mamet, he admires Wallace Shawn, whom he calls "the great chronicler of the ease with which we slowly tumble." "The difference between a perfectly decent person and a monster is just a few thoughts," Shawn writes in the appendix to his play "Aunt Dan and Lemon," which LaBute cites as an influence on his own modest proposals. Charles Metten, who taught directing at Brigham Young, calls LaBute "a young Ibsen," which is perhaps pitching it a bit high. But LaBute is an original voice, and the best new playwright to emerge in the past decade. He brings to his observations about human nature something that other contemporary American writers have not articulated with quite such single-minded authority: a sense of sin.

"The 'should's and 'have to's of Mormonism make Neil struggle with the sinful life," Metten says. "The Latter-Day Saints standards are so high. The humanness of Neil sends him in the other direction. He gets even in his writing." LaBute's plays, which percolate with corrosive skepticism, are, in fact, by-products of the righteous life. "The interesting thing about sin is that we've gotten a bit away from it," LaBute says. "There's a right and a wrong that goes beyond the daily practice of living, and I think we have gotten away from that idea, yet it sort of hangs over all of us." His stories show a sense of goodness being leached out of the lives of his characters and, more hilariously, out of their vocabulary. In "Your Friends and Neighbors," the subject comes up over a meal:

BARRY: Do you think you're good?
CARY: What, a good fuck?
BARRY: No, "good." I'm asking you, do you think you're good?
CARY: "Good," what do you mean, "good"? What kinda question is that?
BARRY: I'm asking . . . I'm saying are you, you know, like, a "good person"?
CARY: Hey, I'm eating lunch . . .

Later, when the thorny issue of salvation comes up—the question of whether they'll ultimately have to "pay" for their behavior, in Barry's weasel words—Cary says, "I mean, if there ends up being a God or something like that whole eternity thing out there, like, then, yeah, probably so. I dunno. We'll see. But until then, we're on my time, O.K.? The interim is mine." LaBute's characters are so lost to themselves, so separated from their souls, that they can't feel anything; they hurt people in *order* to feel something. The murderous mothers and fathers, the violent college boys, the conniving friends and rampant seducers in his work continually dramatize sin as the inability to imagine the suffering of others.

As a boy, LaBute often went to church and participated in Bible study, even though his parents didn't. He grew up with intimations of a faithless world—what he calls "a vague foreboding that something was not quite right." He explains, "I'm sure a lot of my love of stories—of watching film or theatre, imagining myself in some other context—came from the unsettling environment at home." When LaBute's producing partner, Stephen Pevner, called him at the Seattle Film Festival, after the initial success of "In the Company of Men," in 1997, Pevner remembers getting LaBute's soft-spoken mother, Marian, on the phone. "I said, 'It's taken so long. It must feel so good. He did it, he really did it!' She goes, 'I know. He captured his father perfectly.' I said, 'Well, I actually meant he did it. He pulled it off.' And she goes, 'I know what you meant.' "

"There's a great deal of my father in a lot of the characters that people find somewhat unseemly," LaBute says. Richard LaBute, who was ten years older than his wife, had wanted to be an airline pilot but ended up a truck driver; he specialized in long-distance hauling during Neil's childhood, which was spent mostly in Liberty Lake, Washington, outside Spokane. "As a kid, you get a sense of betrayal you can't put specifics to—a sense of women down the line is what one can make a leap to," LaBute says of his handsome father's long absences. (Richard and Marian were divorced about five years ago, after thirty-five years of marriage.) "My mother never talked about it. When I was old enough to talk about it, I really wasn't interested to find out the truth." He continues, "There must be something there that I don't necessarily want the answer to, because it helps fuel the writing."

Neil, the second child (his brother Richard, Jr., is a linguist and digital-processing executive in Minneapolis), was a bookish, sensitive, goofy-looking kid. Aaron Eckhart describes Neil's father as "a hard-ass" who was "always chipping at him." The family pattern, LaBute says, was to "spackle over problems" and "keep everything hidden—any kind of strife that would make my father angry. I can remember when he came home, a great sense of anticipation, because of not knowing what mood he'd come back in." His father's temper gave LaBute a sense of casual brutality and of "how much damage could be done with language." He goes on, "I can remember working with my father on a car. He'd gone inside. The only thing that really sets me off is inanimate objects, because there's no reasoning with them. I let out a tirade that would have made someone proud. I didn't realize he'd come back into the garage. He looked at me, and I got the sense of 'So this is part of the legacy I've left behind.' "

When LaBute gets angry, according to Eckhart, "he crawls inside himself." Pevner says, "If you're good to him, he's extremely good to you. If you're bad to him, forget it. What's worse than the wrath of God? You won't get anything. You will get nothing." LaBute doesn't like to be touched; he resists intimacy. "He doesn't want people to know too much," the actress Hilary Russell says. "He's the only friend of mine that I feel very close to but I don't know absolutely everything about. There's a lot of dark stuff, and he's trying to figure it all out." LaBute's cordiality and his mystery are confounding. It is as if, like his plays, the warmth of his surface disguises colder depths. "He's very hard to read," says Pevner, who has worked with LaBute for a decade and still doesn't know the exact address of his home, in a northern suburb of Chicago. "He likes ambiguity. He will end up doing something he doesn't want to do, simply not to have a confrontation. He articulates through his writing, and that's it."

LaBute's mother, a fervid Anglophile, encouraged her son's love of drama and film, but his father did not; from the age of ten, Neil waged a perpetual losing battle against his father about his being what he calls "an indentured servant" on a farm that his father operated as a sideline. To LaBute's knowledge, his father, whom he hears from infrequently, has never seen one of his plays or films. Charles Metten recalls sitting in his office at Brigham Young with LaBute, who was planning to write a play about fathers and sons for Metten to direct. "I asked, 'Will it be another "All My Sons"?' He said, 'No, it's gonna be better.' Then, for the first time in our friendship, he started to talk about his father. Tears welled up. He got very, very emotional. In fact, he left and went to the rest room."

Though LaBute was the president of his high-school class, he refused to attend Friday-night football games, because they coincided with the weekly changing of the feature at the local cinema. His yearbook is filled with pictures of him: in "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" (he played Snoopy), "Arsenic and Old Lace," and "Don't Drink the Water." At Brigham Young, which he attended on a scholarship, LaBute continued to act, but he preferred the detachment of writing. He began providing monologues and scenes for friends going into the Irene Ryan Acting Competition, one of whom got to the finals. "I had a quick ability to write short, kind of pungent sketches and monologues," he says. "I had the hardest time writing anything of length, because I hated the idea of stopping. I loved to sit down and finish something. I was always writing short pieces. It was the opposite of writer's block." LaBute earned a B.A. in 1985; he married Gore, whom he had met at Brigham Young, and they moved to New York, hoping that he could parlay his sketch-writing skills into a berth on "Late Night with David Letterman" or "Saturday Night Live."

In his first, frustrating taste of the New York scene, LaBute's confidence was severely tested. A friend gave him the home telephone number of Lorne Michaels, "S.N.L." 's executive producer, and LaBute cold-called him. " 'How did you get my number?' " LaBute remembers Michaels saying. " 'Please don't call me here again. Send it in to the show.' That was the extent of my sketch-writing career. From then on, I started to say, 'Well, then, I'll just make it happen for myself as much as I can.' "

LaBute's early plays were the subject of scandal and concern at Brigham Young, where he worked toward a Ph.D. in the early nineties. "The faculty revered Neil, but they were also afraid of him," recalls Eckhart, who first performed LaBute's work as an undergraduate. "This material was absolutely subversive. They thought it was going to tear down the theatre department." The Mormon atmosphere "forced Neil to be more creative, because of the restrictions, the no-nos," Metten says. "Neil was in constant battle." For instance, in order to prevent the staging of "Lepers," which LaBute had rehearsed for three months, the administration locked up the theatre and even the lightboard; LaBute, who was able to get into the theatre only to give a final exam, cut short the exam and did his play. "There was a glee in him," says Tim Slover, who taught playwriting and in whose postgraduate course LaBute wrote "In the Company of Men." "He knew he was doing important work. But the glee was over the fact that this important moral work had surface features that appalled people."

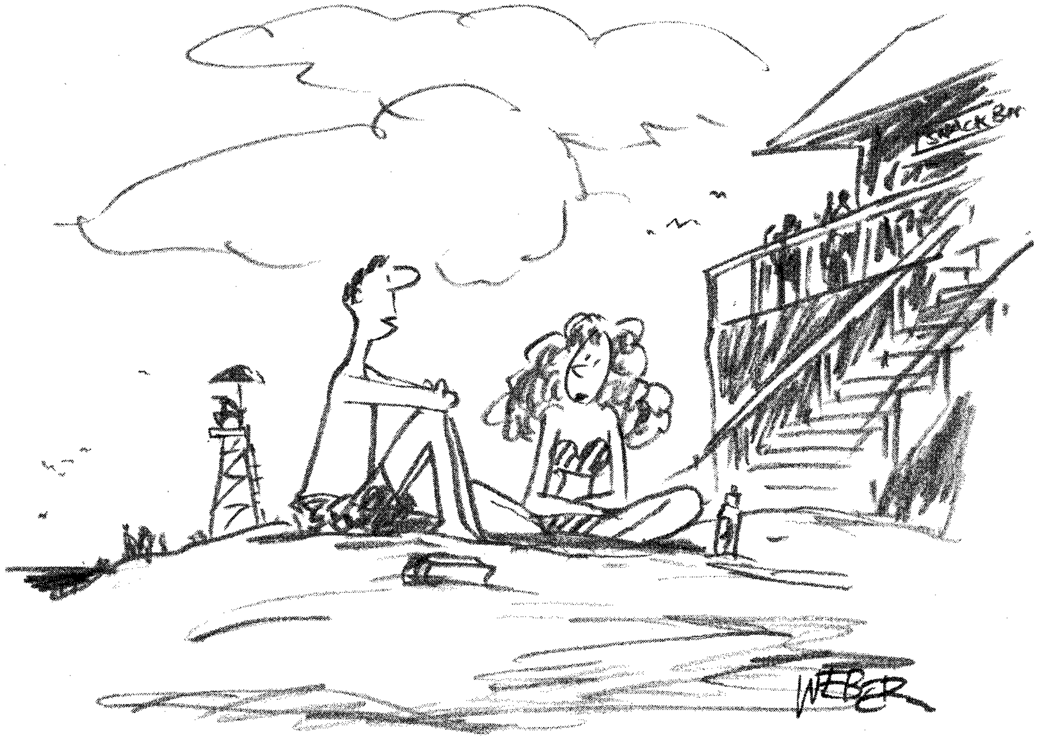
In the larger world, LaBute's uncompromising scripts—which he typed all in lower case, so as not to impede the flow of his thought, and with no stage directions—were hard to sell. "There was a long period of writing plays and putting them away," says LaBute, who supported himself by teaching, and by working in a series of psychiatric hospitals and correctional institutions, where he was able to write late at night. Except for the productions he generated, mostly in university settings, his plays were not getting done. He was, he says, "torn by the hunger to get the work out there and have people see it."

"He wanted to be the greatest living playwright in America," Metten says of his student, whom he characterizes as "a pain in the butt because he was a genius." He adds, "When he would do his work, he knew it was darn good and that he would be ostracized from the regular community." LaBute's plays brought him into conflict not just with the community but with forces closer to home. At Brigham Young, his wife was conspicuously absent from his productions. "I came right out and asked 'Doesn't it hurt your feelings?' " Hilary Russell says. "He's like, 'You know, it did at first.' He just kind of hardens himself. She must know his work, and she's just avoiding it—she's going against every single Mormon standard in not supporting her husband." Although Lisa Gore is listed as a creative consultant on "In the Company of Men," there seems to have been serious disagreement on "Your Friends and Neighbors" up to the first day of filming. "There was a major issue of Lisa's being afraid he'd be excommunicated—I mean, in the Mormon church you're not supposed to even think impure thoughts," says Russell, who was on the set the first day, when LaBute got his wife's phone call. "She said, 'You can't make it. How can you make this film?' I knew something was wrong just by his eyes."

LaBute's exploration of self-aggrandizement is also, by inference, about self-sacrifice: it reflects in theatrical terms his own internal battle to be at once great and good. "There's the Church telling you, 'You can't make these films or you'll go to Hell,' " Eckhart says of LaBute. "And there are other ramifications. Neil's wife holds a position in the Church. You got the whole social thing. It's very acute. I think everything in his life, on a certain level, is telling him in some way to forsake his true love—his work."

Before he got the financing for "In the Company of Men," Eckhart remembers LaBute's saying, "I don't know if I can make a film. Who's going to trust me?" He was an unknown director, with an unknown script, unknown performers, and an unhappy ending. His father-in-law, an importer of industrial silks, declined to invest, but two of LaBute's former students stumped up their insurance payouts from a car accident. The actors got themselves to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where, in the mid-nineties, LaBute was teaching at St. Francis College; his next-door neighbor put them up. "We had a wonderful D.P. and sound guy, but, as far as everyone else, they were all volunteers from Fort Wayne—I mean, postal workers, college students, housewives," Stacy Edwards, who played the woman, says. "Neil was doing everything that normally would take at least six people to take care of."

LaBute shot "In the Company of Men" in eleven days, on twenty-five thousand dollars. Later, Sony added a quarter-million dollars in postproduction money to the film, and it grossed over five million dollars. "We knew through the entire shoot we really only had two takes per scene," Edwards says. "So you had to get it right." Eckhart recalls, "Stacy and I were sitting at that restaurant. It was six o'clock at night. We didn't close the



"I see myself going into some form of public service, like banking."

restaurant down, because he had no money. Those customers are real, and they're kicking us out. So Neil comes up to me and says, 'Aaron, we've done it once, and it isn't right.' It was on my closeup and the last shot of the day. He says, 'Aaron, we've got one hundred feet of film left. We're getting kicked out of the restaurant.' He goes, 'Don't feel any pressure, but you have to get this one.' How many times did I hear that?"

There was no video playback, there were no dailies, and there was almost no movie when the lab gave LaBute three days to pay his bill or lose the film. But the end of the struggle came with a standing ovation at the Sundance Festival, where "In the Company of Men" won the 1997 Filmmakers Trophy. "In the middle of the screening, I turned to Matt Malloy and said, 'This thing is hot,' " Eckhart says. "I knew Neil felt that way. When we came out, it was right there on his face—'All right! This is going somewhere. I'm vindicated. Everything that I knew about myself has just happened.' He didn't say it. I saw it."

"It's eBay fever—we'll have to pull the plug!"

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I LAST saw LaBute in Projection Room 7 of a squat building off Santa Monica Boulevard, where he was hunkered down in the far-right-hand corner of the first row of a screening room, watching seven hours of dailies. For this marathon, the members of his team were spread out behind him over five rows: they came and went, snoozed and talked as clapper board after clapper board announced a new take of shots 87 A through D. I sat directly behind LaBute, hoping he might talk to me during the process. He didn't. Instead, he worked away at a large bag of Doritos and a Pepsi as he watched a well-shot sequence that included a white Mercedes tearing up the ramp of a hospital emergency entrance and ramming an ambulance; an exchange of gunfire; flying bodies; breaking glass; and Nurse Betty, in her hospital disguise, pressed into real medical service by some gun-waving gangbangers who mistake her for the genuine article.

In the film, Nurse Betty is spellbound; and it struck me over the next hour that perhaps the purpose of this exercise for LaBute was to live, however briefly, in the exhilarating spell of the Hollywood system that had captivated him as an adolescent on those Friday nights. LaBute had accomplished the hardest thing: he had found both a style and an audience for his point of view. Now, for the moment at least, he was giving up the personal for the impersonal, the subversive for something that conformed more or less to the commercial formulas that his other movies shunned. "Nurse Betty," a will-she-or-won't-she saga, plays against LaBute's great strength, which is to force the audience to take a position rather than to abdicate thought for the sake of fun. I tried to see it through his eyes. Pevner had told me, "I think he wanted to acquire power—you know, psychological power, emotional power, financial power. To overcome his obstacles. I think he's truly a romantic figure."

In a way, a full-blown Hollywood movie could be seen as LaBute's victory lap—a little moment of vindictive triumph, to show the panjandrums of commerce who'd rejected his early work that he could succeed in this part of the business, too. In the past, he had access to nobody; now he was on the Rolodex of everyone in town. He was an artist with money chores to be done, and sometimes it was wise to give the piper a dance. There were historical precedents: Scorsese's "Cape Fear," Hitchcock's "Dial M for Murder," Huston's "Annie." Then again perhaps this dance was not for the piper at all but for the Mormon brethren, and maybe even for his wife, who wanted him to delight the world rather than disenchant it.

When LaBute and I talked again, a couple of weeks ago, he was making plans to come East for rehearsals of "Bash." He declared himself pleased with "Nurse Betty" and with the new bag of tricks he'd mastered. "It's sort of freeing," he said. I asked him if the film was LaButian, and, with typical LaButian ambivalence, he answered, "Yes—and no." He did see some thematic connections with his plays and his tougher work. "There is a series of mediocre-to-bad men and a woman scrambling to save themselves," he said. With LaBute, one way or another, salvation remains the issue. ♦

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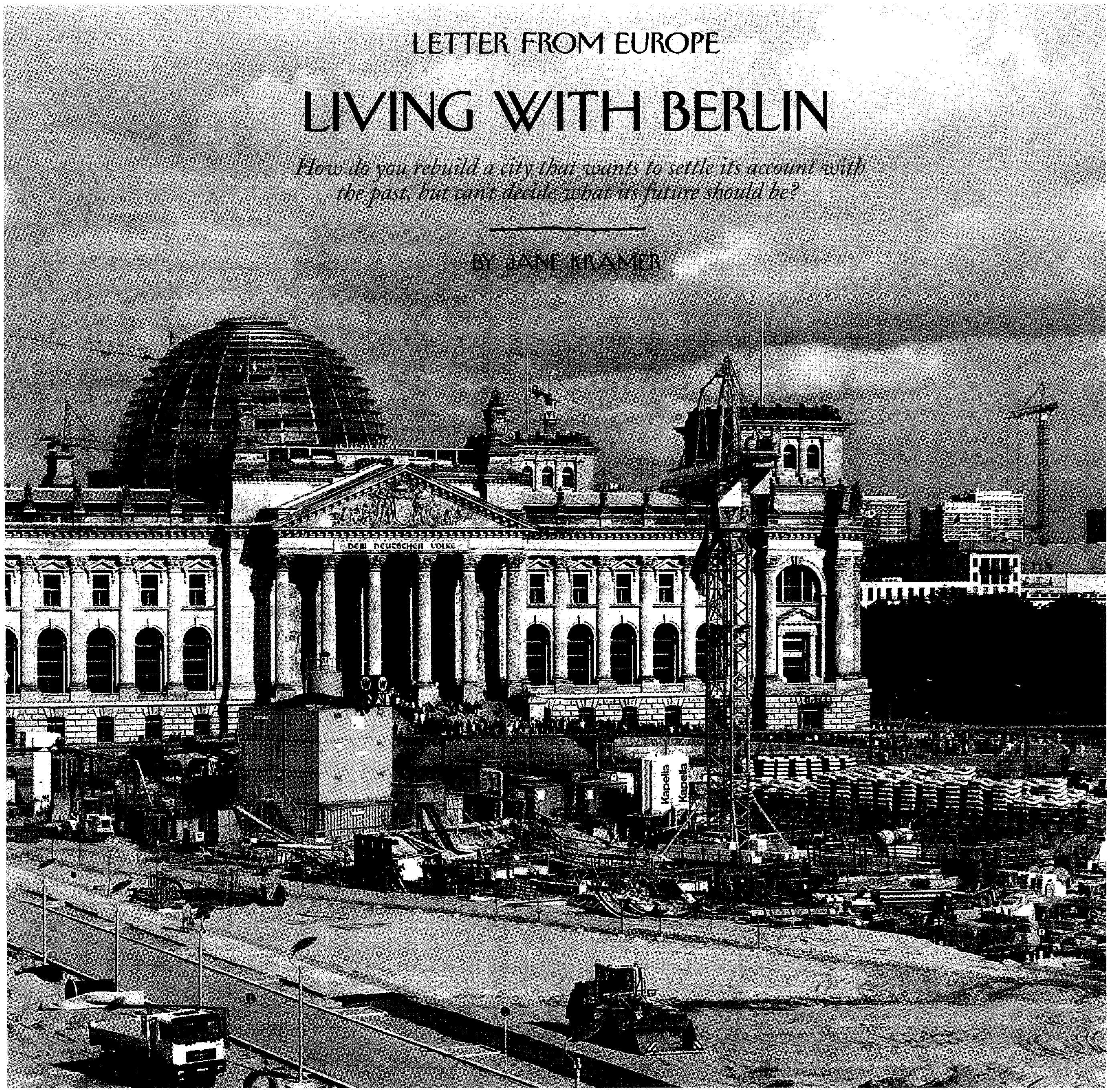
ONE morning in Berlin this spring, on my way to an interview with a city planner, I stopped at the new Galeries Lafayette, in the east of the city on Friedrichstrasse, to pick up a croissant at the basement supermarket. By then, I had been in Berlin for at least a week. I had tried counting the construction cranes—seven hundred of them, the papers said—dipping over the born-again capital of a united Germany. I had prowled the sites of that construction, tracing the path of a wall and a no man's land that only ten years ago had split the city down its center. I had toured the Chancellery and some of the other new government buildings going up around the Reichstag, itself restored with a new glass dome. I had been through the Potsdamer Platz, where Sony and DaimlerChrysler were hosting a real-estate-development potlatch on twenty-eight acres of what used to be bombed-out desert. And I had seen the Schlossplatz, in East Berlin, where people were still arguing about the fate of an immense and incontestably ugly building called the Palace of the Republic, which until November of 1989, when the Wall came down, had housed the East German parliament. I had dug up the figures: five thousand six hundred and forty architects practicing in Berlin; a hundred and thirty thousand workers officially rebuilding Berlin (and no one knows how many unregistered foreign crews still bunking in converted shipping-container dormitories on the big sites); six thousand bureaucrats drawing salaries to (depending on who's talking) contribute to or complicate the

LETTER FROM EUROPE

LIVING WITH BERLIN

How do you rebuild a city that wants to settle its account with the past, but can't decide what its future should be?

BY JANE KRAMER



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT POLIDORI

For Sir Norman Foster, creating a politically correct version of the Reichstag (above) proved to be the hardest job in town.

process. I had heard all about "the architecture of the European city," "the architecture of the Berlin Republic," "the architecture of civil society," "the architecture of public space," and "the architecture of democratic transparency." I had spent so much time looking at buildings, thinking about buildings, listening to people whose job it was to try to redeem or redefine or reinvent "Germanness" through the new buildings of the capital, that my trip to the Galeries Lafayette was the first time I had actually used any of those buildings in what for me could be considered a normal way. That is, I went shopping. I contemplated the tights, priced the sweaters, left without buying anything, and was late to my interview. I explained to the planner that I'd been "lost" in the Galeries Lafayette. It was a word my husband would have understood, but not the planner. He thought for a while, nodding in a solemn way, and then he said that this was understandable, since Jean Nouvel, the architect who had designed the department store, was "a protagonist of the dark side of the public sphere."

Now, you expect to hear a lot of arguments about architects in Berlin these days or, for that matter, about anyone innocent enough or arrogant enough to think that he or she can contribute to the reconstruction of Germany's capital and get out cheerfully with no more baggage than a paycheck and a thank-you note from the mayor. But it's safe to say that only in Berlin will you hear that a middle-sized, medium-priced department store with seventeen brands of tights and fresh breakfast pastries in the basement is a field of battle for nothing less than the soul of Germany—and not even because of its assault on your pocketbook (Germans call it "consumer terrorism") but because of a cone-shaped glass-and-steel atrium that a planner found "authoritarian," and not the "agora" he had hoped for.

The change in Berlin over the past few years has been astonishing, and, with this sort of architectural anguish (it's endemic now), the most astonishing part may be that anything gets built at all. Felix Zwoch, who edits the architectural weekly *Bauwelt*, says that he sees more people at some of the big public Berlin planning debates than he saw on the opening night of the Berlin Film Festival—and, in fact, when I arrived the hottest ticket in town wasn't (my guess) Daniel Barenboim conducting the Chicago Symphony in Brahms's "A German Requiem" but a lecture by the Swiss architect of an archive and exhibition center devoted to the documenting of Nazi police procedures. Every city creates a market in its own obsessions, and right now in Berlin the obsession is architecture—or, more accurately, how to make a credible Berlin out of a city with no consensual idea of itself, and no common history beyond a negative one.

Ten years ago, you could climb a scaffold on the Potsdamer Platz and see the attack dogs charging around on the other side of the Wall. Today, you climb a bright-red, prefab Info Box and pick out the new buildings by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. You look north to Norman Foster and east to Aldo Rossi, and wonder where it all went—the two Berlins, the four occupying armies, the thirty-mile Wall with the guard towers and the dogs—because, whatever the rhetoric of one Germany, whatever the fantasies about becoming the capital of that Germany, ten years ago there was no real prospect for change and certainly no idea of what to do with the city if change came.

The West had imagined East Berlin as the cutting edge of the Soviet empire—the efficient, disciplined, technological, German edge—but East Berlin turned out to be a messy, deteriorating place, a shabby police-state capital not so different from most of the other Eastern-bloc capitals. Some of its old buildings were still bombed out when the Wall came down. Some were still pocked with bullet holes from the battle for Berlin in 1945. As for the new buildings in East Berlin, they were ruins in the making: huge Stalinist office and apartment blocks for the Party bureaucrats; ghostly "new towns" like Marzahn and Hellersdorf, on mudflats to the east of the city, each town built to house more than a hundred thousand people but not, as it turned out, built to last even the short life span of an Eastern worker in a polluted factory. The official Communist view of German history, with its three failed Reichs, was not much of a boon to architecture. The Communists hoped that history would go away, and when it didn't they removed it. It was a process that began in the East in 1950, when Stalin's friend Walter Ulbricht, the East German Party Secretary, blew up the Hohenzollern Schloss, on the Schlossplatz—a castle almost as big as the Louvre, and, from the point of view of German history, just as important, given that the Hohenzollern dynasty had ruled Prussia, and then Germany, until the end of the First World War. Ulbricht said that he was purging his half of the city of what, ignoring himself, he claimed was its last symbol of totalitarian rule, and Erich Honecker, his successor, did eventually use the land to build the "people's palace"—the Palace of the Republic—that everyone is arguing about now. (It's a tinted-glass-and-Bulgarian-marble oblong box, and, even by official Communist standards, hard to think of as a palace.) But until Honecker built his palace—it was finished in 1976—that huge empty space on the Schlossplatz was the closest thing to an architectural statement you could find in East Berlin. The Communists were practical. They settled comfortably into what was left of Hitler's old ministries, added a few brown couches of indeterminate and nubbly fabric, and assumed, correctly, that no one would really care, since East Berliners had come to believe what they taught their children—that Nazism was a disease that had spread in the west of Germany but had rarely crossed over and infected them.

If the color of choice in East Berlin was brown (the first grumblings from West Berliners crossing east in November of '89 were that the sheets were brown, the towels were brown, the tablecloths and napkins were brown), the colors in West Berlin were the pretty pastels of the Deutsche mark, because until the Wall fell West Berliners were drifting through life in a shower of West German cash. They got construction subsidies and hardship salaries and tax breaks just for being there. They were enlightened by imported intellectuals, entertained by artists and writers and musicians flown in with the pricey clothes at the shops on Kurfürstendamm (West Berlin's Fifth Avenue), and they were exhibited to the rest of the world as the valiant outpost of a new, democratic German culture—a concept shrewdly extended to include a feisty and flamboyantly costumed counterculture, squatting in a neighborhood called Kreuzberg, which in time became the city's most popular tourist draw. No one in West Berlin was accountable, for the simple reason that in this brave new *Ich bin ein Berliner* democracy no one Western could ever be seen to fail. West Germans, diligent, driven, and getting rich in the safe, serious cities of the Federal Republic, had almost as little enthusiasm for West Berliners as they had for East Berliners. Mainly, they didn't like paying for the West Berliners, although they knew they had to. For the twenty-eight years that the Wall stood, West Berlin was freedom's fully owned and operated kindergarten, where you faced down the East and (to borrow from Auden) said "Boo" to the Wall. "We are still here!"

West Berliners in those days were excused from history. The Wall absolved them. They were an island in the Communist East, patriots under siege, and anything important they built became a Cold War statement, whether or not they intended to make one. The most famous example is Hans

Scharoun's Philharmonic Hall, which he designed in 1956, five years before the Wall appeared. Scharoun was a passionate Berlin democrat, repelled by Nazi architecture and determined to replace the lurid theatricality of Nazi performance space with what the young Berlin architect and critic Jan Fischer once described to me as "revolutionary, democratic, asymmetrical organicism." The result, as Fischer says, was Berlin's most important postwar building. But by opening night at the Philharmonic the Wall was up and the Philharmonic was literally up against it. Scharoun's challenge to the Nazi past was celebrated as Berlin's challenge to the Eastern present—a statement more about Russians than about Germans.

"Gee, I had no idea you were married to a supermodel."

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Politicians loved the big, lopsided yellow building less for its brilliance or for its evident sincerity than for the chance it gave them, as a symbol, to conflate the legacy of the past and the politics of the present and, in a way, put that terrible past on hold. You could even say that they loved the Wall for the same reason, and in the end, from the point of view of rebuilding West Berlin, the Wall wasn't such a bad thing. It gave the city a kind of crazy normalcy. No one had to argue about making a politically correct Reichstag out of the building where Hitler had come to power, because no one was going to convene the Reichstag as long as there was a wall beside it. No one had to worry about building a big road through the city—would that be a Nazi statement, because Albert Speer, the official architect of the Third Reich, had planned one?—because no one was going to build a road to a wall. When most architects talked about the meaning of public space, they meant parks and lakes and shopping centers. The only transparency that people mentioned was the glass façade of Mies van der Rohe's beautiful New National Gallery, which opened in 1968, and the only "agora," besides the garden at the Café Einstein, where the artists and intellectuals ate their *Strudel mit Schlag,* was the main hall of the public library that Scharoun designed just south of his Philharmonic Hall.

A lot of West Berlin's new architecture was terrible. The convention center looked like a bad airport; the airport looked like a bad high school; the high schools looked like bad military housing; and the office buildings were so banal that you could say "Berlin office building" to any architect in the West and watch his eyes roll. For years, most of the Berlin scandals that weren't about spies were about construction. The local builders were famously corrupt. The big commercial commissions went to a group of local architects and developers so comfortable with their entitlement that they referred to themselves in the same way everybody else did—as the Berlin Building Mafia. The people who invested in real estate, known, collectively, as "the dentist from Frankfurt," were usually *from* Frankfurt, and they cycled their profits through Berlin for the sort of write-offs that Americans reserve for oil companies. But while everyone talked about "building democracy within the Wall," not many people stayed up late at a drawing board trying to avoid allusions to German power, working through what one American writer described as their "capital dilemma."

IN the early nineties, at the start of what the federal government calls "the unification process," a couple of young Berlin architects got together and produced a plan to take the wasteland of weeds and rubble left by the Wall and turn it into a park, with playgrounds and jogging tracks and, as one of them said to me then, "a dog run for pets this time." It wasn't a serious plan—"Let's build a park" is the Berlin euphemism for "We haven't a clue what else to do"—but it made its point, which was that you could live honestly with the past and still make life agreeable for people who happened to be living in the present.

Bonn, where the West German government had sat for more than forty years, was of two minds about Berlin. Some politicians thought that the government of any united Germany should stay in Bonn, for all the obvious symbolic reasons. Others wanted to move, though they hated the idea of such a big, notoriously in-your-face city; they dreamed of putting the government somewhere out in the suburbs and avoiding what they called the aesthetics of German

"I believe we've entered the dark underbelly of pet ownership."

power, the way they had avoided it in Bonn. The heart of the Bonn government was a row of low, modest, workable buildings along the Rhine which could easily be mistaken for a well-funded research institute or an average American college campus. Bonn was not a government that announced itself in architecture; it was, if anything, seemly. (There were people in Bonn in the early nineties who thought that the only decent way for German democracy to move to Berlin was in quonset huts.)

Still, the idea of making a big Berlin splash was irresistible. You knew it was irresistible when Germany got ready to unite, in the fall of 1990, and the president of the West German parliament raised the flag in front of the Reichstag. It wasn't long before even the most liberal politicians were using the words "Berlin Republic." Then the politicians started talking about building the Berlin Republic. It was partly a matter of pride, since they had clearly accomplished something in the course of fifty years, and they wanted to look like other countries that had accomplished something. It was partly a matter of money, since the center of Berlin desperately needed work, and Berlin—with its federal subsidies cut and its population doubled—couldn't afford to build anything on the land it owned as a city, let alone on a political fault line that, technically speaking, belonged to the entire German people. And it was partly a matter of judgment, since an argument could be made—and was made—that the one obvious way to begin uniting a scarred and fractious city, eight times the size of Paris, was through the buildings that would turn it into a capital and at the most brutally symbolic point of its destruction and division.

Berlin's reprieve was over. To the dismay of most Berliners, who had liked being the bad boys of West German democracy—the last ironists in a doggedly earnest country—Germany had, with some relief and even a certain malice, formally dumped the burden of German history on them. And now the Berliners who used to look at a building that announced itself in anything like an arrogant or aggressive way and turn it into a joke about Germany have begun to analyze its intentions. They check it out for improvident design, as if some unpleasant, ideological DNA might be lurking inside it. They look for Hitler in the details—in the shape of a window or in the blocks of a façade or in the corporate logo on a roof. They are all, suddenly, amateur semiologists, tracking the signs of a terrible Zeitgeist that they worry will replace their own. They are preoccupied with the state of their German souls, with being German, after fifty years of what may have been a healthy vacation from themselves.

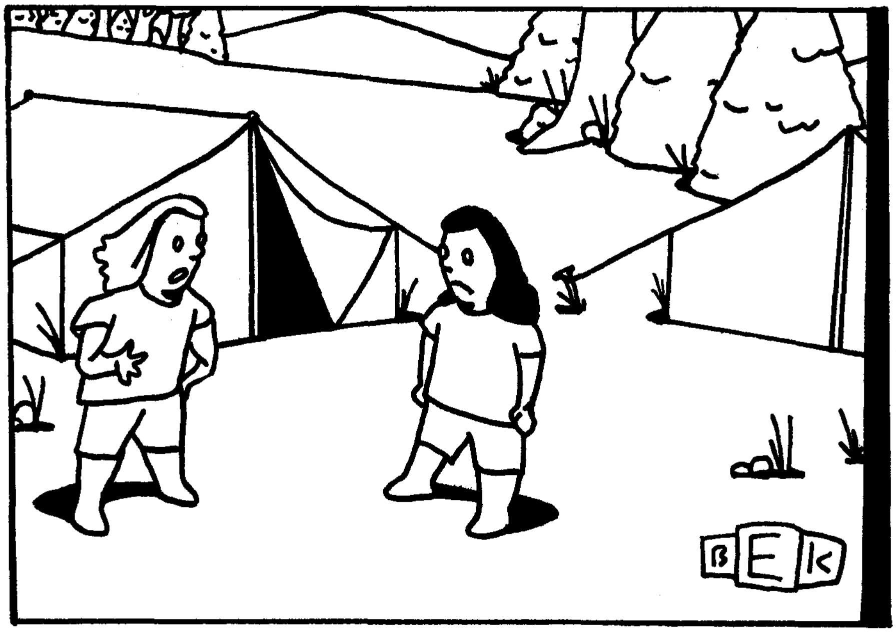
The irony of Albert Speer's legacy is that Berliners seem finally to believe in the power of architecture as much as he did. They believe in it theologically, the way Paris believes in bread or Los Angeles believes in plastic surgeons. They live in a capital from which the worst of Germany's history was decreed, and now that the government is moving back to that capital they have convinced themselves that the right buildings will somehow produce the right attitudes in the people inside them. They like the transparency of the Reichstag dome—it's the most visited place in the city now—because they think it will somehow guarantee that openness and democracy thrive in the Reichstag. They think that the right number of stone slabs in a Holocaust monument will possess a memory of mass death; that the right balance of concrete and glass in a building for their Chancellor will temper authority with accountability; that the right width of a street will turn a thoroughfare into a public sphere; that the right staggering of heights in an office complex on the Potsdamer Platz will somehow persuade the Brandenburg factory workers shopping in a tourist mall across the road that the executives at DaimlerChrysler are ordinary Germans, just like them, only a few floors higher. Berliners want all the good things for Berlin: they want to settle its account with history, they want to transform history, transcend history, locate a piece of history that every Berliner can agree is neutral and possibly even agreeable, and at the same time is incontestably German. They think that buildings can do this, but maybe they are not so sure that Germans can do it.

II.

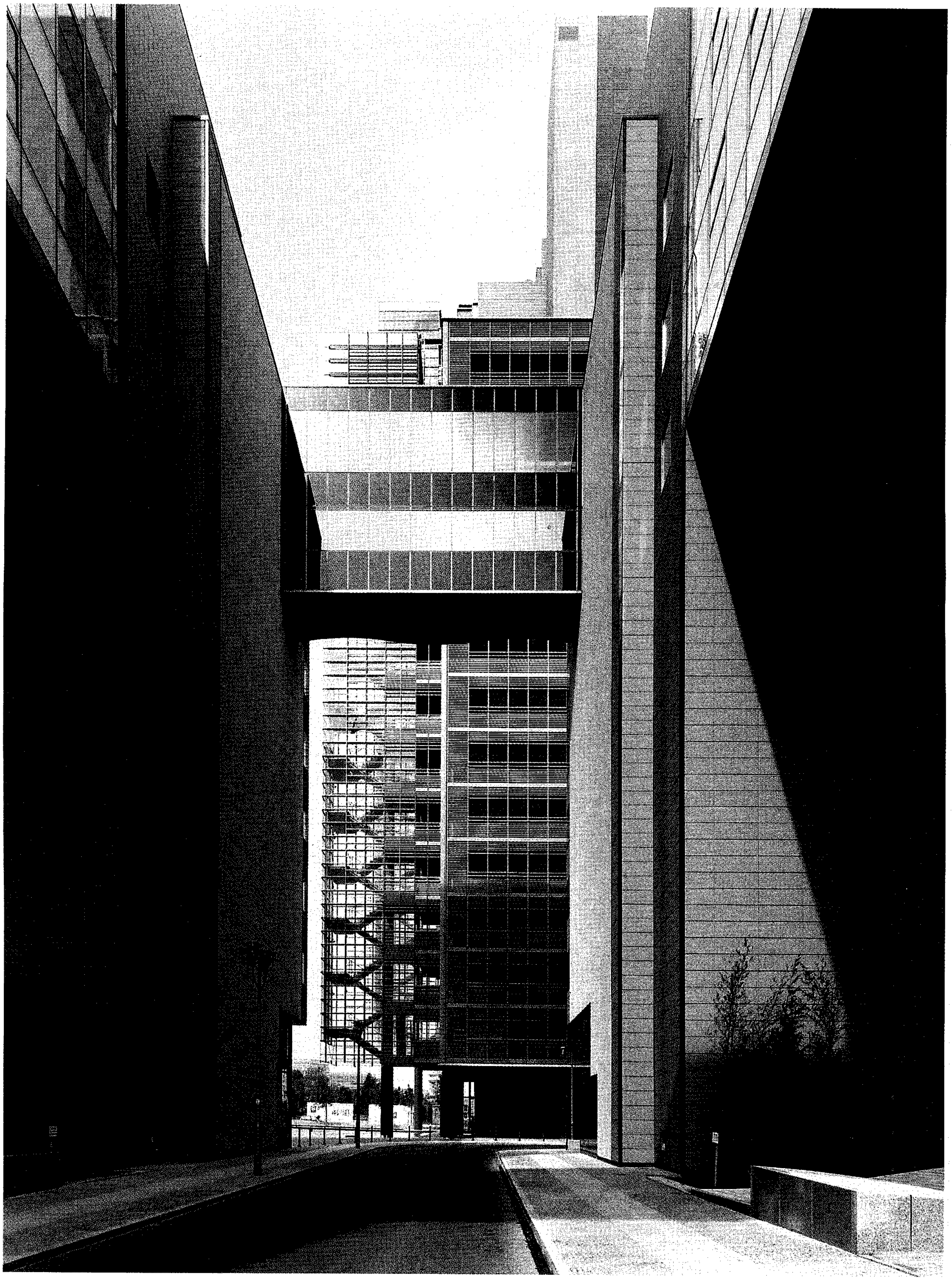
TEN years ago, the operative affectionate word for Berlin was "shit"—as in "Berlin? It's shit!" It meant that Berlin was a scene, Berlin was spacey and tough and free in its Wall, Berlin had nothing to do with the tedious, rich civilities of the Federal Republic. Now the operative words are "golden age." Every Berliner seems to have in his mind some golden Berlin moment when everything was perfect and everyone was happy—a moment to recapitulate, a moment that can define the city now. Some people think that that moment was Weimar, cross-dressing, cabarets, and a great Jewish department store near the Potsdamer Platz. Some think that it was turn-of-the-century, marbled sandstone, French food, and a private palace on the Pariser Platz. Some think that it was Prussia, Friedrich I, court mistresses, and a garden with Baroque statues on the Schlossplatz. Some—this is in East Berlin, where people tend to forget the night they rushed the Wall to drink champagne and hear Rostropovich play Bach on his cello—think that it was Communism, jobs, and Saturday-night dancing in the basement of Honecker's people's palace. You can spend weeks in Berlin, as I did, and the only people you'll meet without golden moments of their own are the people who happen to be Turkish immigrants. This, of course, is what gives the planners much more power than the architects. Michael Mussotter, who has been practicing architecture in Berlin for ten years, likes to complain that "Berlin considers urbanism a godly profession," and he's right. The planners here get to decide in large part what the "real" Berlin—call it the Golden Moment Berlin—should look like, where precisely that Berlin was situated, and when, if ever, it existed.

In the summer of 1991, eight months after unification, a West German planner named Hans Stimmann became the director of Berlin's huge planning bureaucracy. Stimmann was a Social Democrat. He had an academic's taste for buildings "in the Berlin tradition" and, more important, a talent for handling Berlin's notoriously provincial politicians. And, in a way, he solved the problem of a golden moment—first, because he dominated the juries for the city's innumerable mandatory planning and architectural competitions, and, second, because his own Berlin moment was a polyglot of every moment except the present. It was Stimmann's belief that the real Berlin, the Berlin of exemplary civic and social virtues, had been a cluster of small streets and low stone houses with matching windows—a kind of ur-European city where every building looked as much as possible like every other building. He wasn't troubled by the fact that in his version it tended to combine the proportions of a nineteenth-century town house, the materials of an eighteenth-century palace, and the claustrophobia of a seventeenth-century slum; he thought that anyone with a taste for height, glass, metal, or, for that matter, "architecture" should be encouraged to move. He is famous for making lists of architects who, in his opinion, have ruined the fabric of Berlin, and right now his list includes Mies van der Rohe, Hans Scharoun, and Daniel Libeskind—Libeskind being the architect of Berlin's new Jewish Museum, a building of heartstopping depth and by far the most interesting building to go up in Berlin since Mies and Scharoun were alive and working here.

The problem, of course, was that most good architects thought the proper Berlin tradition was the one that began now. They wanted to make a Berlin statement—to temper the presence and the authority of the capital with buildings that were impressively not the capital. They wanted to invent a future that would absorb the government into the life of the city, and they were told to reinvent a moment of history instead. Their orders were to stay in line with the numbing criteria of Stimmann's Berlin concept—which was soon refined, with the help of a local "philosopher of planning" named Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, as a blueprint for the "critical reconstruction" of the city—and to accommodate to the size and density of the "eighteenth-century block" and the "integrity" of the stone façade. (Stimmann called this "the stone Berlin," although much of eighteenth-century Berlin was, in fact, brick, plastered over and painted in the Prussian ochre of the city's sandstone palaces and, incidentally, of Scharoun's Philharmonic Hall.) Some architects con-



"I always end up being attracted to the ones who wear cheap insect repellent."



Renzo Piano tried to send Berlin a thoughtful message with his buildings for DaimlerChrysler (background).

Daniel Libeskind says that the point of his Jewish Museum isn't absence: it's about bringing real history to life.

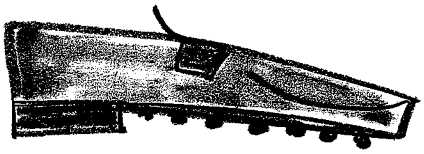
formed. Josef Paul Kleihues, who built the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, put on what one critic called his "Stimmann hat" and did a Berlin-concept reconstruction of the two *hôtels particuliers* that had once stood on either side of the Brandenburg Gate, one of them the old home of Max Liebermann, the Secessionist painter. Some architects played with the concept. Frank Gehry, fresh from building his Guggenheim in Bilbao, designed a bank on the Pariser Platz, just east of the gate, whose mild sandstone façade opens into a wonderfully spiteful stack of collapsing shapes and clashing materials. But it's safe to say that none of the architects were entirely happy with the concept, the possible exception being the ones who rebuilt the famous turn-of-the-century Hotel Adlon, down the block from Gehry's bank, to what they considered its "period authenticity." They produced instead a piece of authentic kitsch that horrified even Stimmann, though it pleased the owners to such a degree that they instructed the young concert pianist who moonlights there on weekends to restrict her music to what a Berliner would have been likely to hear in the lobby at teatime in the years between 1919 and 1933.

IF you look at a Cold War map of central Berlin, you'll find the Brandenburg Gate just where the old imperial boulevard called Unter den Linden, in the East, meets the park called the Tiergarten, in the West. There were places much more desolate than this along the Wall, but probably none more unnerving. While the Wall was up, the only person I knew who got to enjoy a stroll along Unter den Linden, through the Brandenburg Gate, and into the Tiergarten was an old Berlin Jewish refugee in my building in New York, who visited it in her dreams. She would sleepwalk on Central Park West in the middle of the night, wearing a pretty pink robe and chattering away in High German to a couple of Irish night-shift cops—one on each arm—who always looked out for her and brought her home. She thought that the cops were handsome young officers from the Kaiser's regiment, and, though they spoke no German, they were gallant and played their part. She was my introduction to the heart of Berlin—a fantasy heart, compounded by age and loss. I liked her Berlin, but it never occurred to me that anyone alive at the turn of another century would believe in it enough to want to restore it, or to think he could.

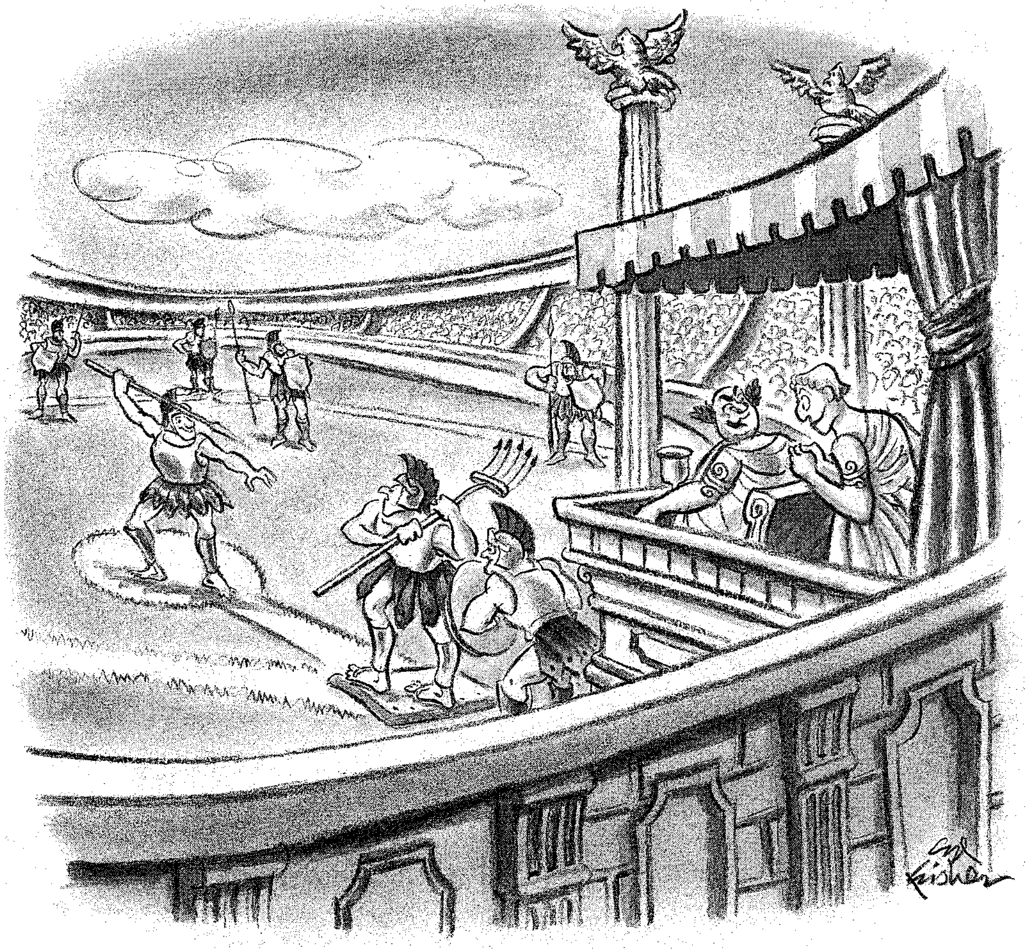
The Reichstag stands at the edge of the Tiergarten, a couple of hundred yards northwest of the Brandenburg Gate. It was built with a dome, in the manner of a proper nineteenth-century imperial capital, but the dome was damaged in the war and was removed in the nineteen-fifties, and no one had ever seriously suggested replacing it. When the British architect Sir Norman Foster set out to transform the Reichstag (he won the competition for it in 1993, and work on the building started two years later), he was thinking of a much more radical reconstruction. He wanted to strip the building of abstract symbols of German power, symbols like domes, and to proceed instead almost archeologically through the vestiges of its tragic history—the ducal crests and chiselled stone of the German Empire, the smooth plaster "rationalism" of a Cold War restoration—to the strong structural authority that is his own signature and, you could say, the signature of a working democracy. His plan included a whole new canopy for the old roof. That was his competition brief. Then someone on some committee decided that the brief was wrong, that the Reichstag should send a more modest "message," and reduced the scale of the renovation by half. A year and a half later, another committee decided that the message was too modest, and Bonn told Foster to add a dome. Foster went through more than forty designs before he produced a dome that pleased the politicians and, at the same time, worked for him as something positive and didn't, as one reporter put it, "stick a Kaiser's helmet on the Berlin Republic," or (there was actually a proposal for this) a dunce cap.

The dome turned out to be spectacular—one of what the press calls Sir Norman's "celebrations" of modern building technology. It is a feat of architectural engineering, with steel ribs to support the glass; a huge cantilevered sunshade to revolve around it, filtering light; and two ramps spiralling to the top like a double helix. Mark Braun, a young Berlin architect who worked with Foster on the building, and who showed me around it, calls the ramps "fourteen hundred feet of public space," and, indeed, they were meant for people looking out over the city and down through a glass floor into the deputies' chamber—for keeping an eye, as it were, on the democratic process. That idea got somewhat lost in the process; the deputies didn't mind looking up at a dome full of people, but they did mind looking up at a dome full of people who were looking at *them*, and the result was a kind of adjustable opacity.

Clients are, of course, difficult. Foster's were no more difficult than, say, Richard Meier's at the Getty. But no important architect I know who entered any of Berlin's capital competitions remembers an experience as unsettling. Berlin wanted an imaginary eighteenth century. Bonn wanted a politically correct Berlin Republic. And, as far as any kind of correctness goes, Foster had the hardest job in town. When he designed dark-gray seats for the deputies, seats that in their cool, neutral color echoed the metal and stone of his restoration, the government told him to keep the color of its Bonn seats—six hundred and sixty-nine of them, covered in a screaming periwinkle fabric—because "German democracy was born in those seats." (They nearly ruin the chamber, though it could be argued that they belong in the Reichstag as much as, say, the Russian graffiti, from 1945, that Foster uncovered there and kept.) When Foster wanted French limestone for the floors, Bonn told him to order German limestone. (The people in Foster's office call it "political limestone.") And when he created a slim new flying eagle for the chamber wall the government told him to keep the shape of its Bonn eagle, because that eagle was sedentary, fat, and "friendly." (He signed the back of his Bonn eagle, making a small gesture, the irony of which was lost on the deputies.)



RIGHT now, the Reichstag is the only building that most Berliners have been able to visit in the hundred-and-fifty-acre construction site they call "the government center." (The others aren't finished.) The site begins in the East, behind the Pariser Platz, runs west into the Tiergarten, past the Reichstag and the scaffolds of the new Chancellery, and ends across a bend in the Spree—Berlin's river—with a Chancellery park. Eight hundred and thirty-five architectural firms competed with master plans for the center. The Berlin architects Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank won. They also won the Chancellery as their own project. It held the most challenge, symbolically, and Schultes, a Berliner since the age of four—he arrived from Dresden in 1947—was well acquainted with the site. He had, in fact, designed a history museum for it only a year before the Wall came down and changed his plans.



"I'm bored. When do we get to kill the ump?"

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The site lies pretty much in the middle of the government's hundred and fifty acres, and the Chancellery going up there now is a square white building with a rounded ceiling poking out of an open roof. Facing east, there is a formal entrance—a glass façade with thin horizontal slats that filter the light through a grid of pale color. (The color is a grayed blue-green, and Schultes likes it so much that he used it in his own studio and, as Bonn will no doubt discover, for the blinds and the ovens of a big and actually quite beautiful crematorium he built in the East Berlin neighborhood of Treptow.) Outside the entrance is a forest of curving columns. Schultes, who is known for a kind of dreamy flair, calls them his "soft walls" and plans to top them with trees to make a real forest, "like the columns in Tivoli." The core of the building isn't enormous, but it's flanked on both sides by long, low walls of offices, and they make it look enormous—something that does not sit well with Berliners, who say there's no reason for the Chancellor of a parliamentary state like theirs to be "challenging" the Reichstag with a big building of his own. In a way, Schultes agrees. He's a disciple of Louis Kahn, and he likes to quote Kahn's maxim about "a community of spaces radiating usefulness." He planned the government center as a series of public spaces, with a long promenade of cafés and galleries and theatres and meeting halls that would link the Chancellery and its offices to a new parliamentary office building and thus to the Reichstag itself—putting the people, he says, between them. He imagined the promenade literally filled with people, a place "where no politics were made." It isn't surprising that none of the politicians liked the idea.

For all their speeches about transparency, the politicians in Bonn were like politicians in most places. What they had in mind for their chunk of Berlin was not so much the scrutiny of the people as a way of escaping the inconvenience of the people. They wanted tunnels, trains, a lot of security, and offices like fortresses. ("Their ideal," according to Petra Bornhöft, at *Der Spiegel*, was "a capital constructed so that they wouldn't even know they're here.") And this is pretty much what they got. The federal office buildings around the Reichstag are already so massive that, even half-built, they threaten to overwhelm the Reichstag. The new train station going up directly across the Spree from the Chancellery—supposedly the biggest train station in Europe—threatens to overwhelm the Chancellery. The Chancellery, going up without its "people's forum," is beginning to look more like a New Age East Hampton estate than like the great public space that Schultes intended. "You die several deaths with the first design," he says.

III.

THE Potsdamer Platz, three-quarters of a mile south of the Reichstag, was never a plaza or a square, as the name would have it. It was an intersection of six big commercial Berlin streets, with a

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hotel called the Esplanade, a café called the Josty, and the first traffic light in town. But the Potsdamer Platz was where Berlin, literally, crossed, and if it came to represent some magical Weimar moment it may be because Weimar was when most Berliners started driving. DaimlerChrysler decided to buy its half of the Potsdamer Platz the spring before the Wall fell. The company was Daimler-Benz then, and its chairman was the son of Ernst Reuter, the first great mayor of West Berlin and the object of much sentiment in the Berlin Rathaus. Daimler got the land—seventeen acres of public space in what would soon be central Berlin—for less than the price of one acre on Kurfürstendamm. It was still, of course, land that no one else wanted. When the Wall fell, Berlin sold the rest of it to Sony for a price that was, scandalously, almost as low, and consoled itself with the thought that, with so much corporate-development money coming in, a big piece of the Berlin desert would bloom fast. "The politicians like instant cities," Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm says. "They know that on a certain day they'll open." But the first master plan for the Potsdamer Platz—which came, with Stimmann's imprimatur, from a firm of Munich architects—was so relentlessly monotonous, so "stone Berlin" in its cautious proportions, that you suspected that nothing would ever open, and so did the Potsdamer Platz clients. It didn't help that most of the big foreign architects those clients were wooing looked at the plan and wondered what had happened to the twentieth century.

Of course, the one given of developing twenty-eight acres of commercial property in the middle of a city with rules is that the people who do it have the money and the power to circumvent rules. Daimler and Sony held competitions of their own, promising to honor the general guidelines of the Munich plan and, naturally, of Stimmann's "concept." Renzo Piano, from Genoa, won for Daimler. He was known in Berlin as an architect of amiable and urbane inventiveness—the Beaubourg, with Richard Rogers, in Paris, the Menil in Houston—and, more to the point, as an advocate of "the European city," which Stimmann, who had to approve his plan for the Daimler lot, seems to have taken mainly to mean "not the American city." Piano signed on for eight of the nineteen Daimler development projects, among them a Berlin headquarters for its real-estate subsidiary, a casino, a couple of office-and-apartment complexes, a musical theatre, an IMAX movie theatre, and the general design of a shopping "arcade" for a hundred and ten stores. (Daimler at one point thought of imposing a five-mark fine on any employee caught using the word "mall.") The rest of the projects were divided: Rogers himself got three buildings; José Rafael Moneo, from Spain by way of Harvard's Design School, got a Hyatt Hotel; a Stimmann protégé named Hans Kollhoff got an office building—and produced one so banal that even the head of Daimler's real-estate subsidiary, Hans-Jürgen Ahlbrecht, described it to me as Kollhoff "copying the past." (He then corrected himself and said, "Kollhoff is *citing*.")

Piano wanted to send Berlin a thoughtful message. He spent days standing on one of the canal bridges, looking over the city and making sketches, and in the end he built his part of the Potsdamer Platz with hardened Mediterranean tiles that played on variations of Prussian ochre, slipped slyly into the criteria of a "stone Berlin," and, at the same time, paid a nice homage to the yellow surfaces of Scharoun's Philharmonic and of his library, just across the canal. But the message that Daimler sent was corporate, commercial, and shrewd. It changed with the times, as the unit price of Berlin property started falling, in the mid-nineties. There was a recession in Eastern Europe, which left Berlin without the big Eastern markets that it had quite reasonably expected. There was the reality of East Berliners moving out of the city to look for jobs (and even for relief from the galling relative prosperity of West Berliners). Daimler stopped talking so much about making the Potsdamer Platz a great Berlin public space, with a "critical mass" of interesting and accomplished people, and started thinking about recouping its investment. "Critical mass" now meant a CinemaxX with nineteen screens, underground parking for twenty-five hundred cars, and carts you could wheel from the lot or, for that matter, from the train station, to the Daimler mall, where every chain in Germany was waiting to sell you something you didn't need, and a private police force was waiting to evict you if you passed out "negative" leaflets (it happened when I was there) or even thought about having a demonstration without a permit. It meant you could eat at Tony Roma's or at McDonald's (which hung its big yellow "M" on the side of one of Piano's buildings), or pay too much for a bad dinner at the Hyatt, or blow your money at the casino, where Piano's walls had been painted purple and covered with a pink neon cowgirl and green neon cactuses.

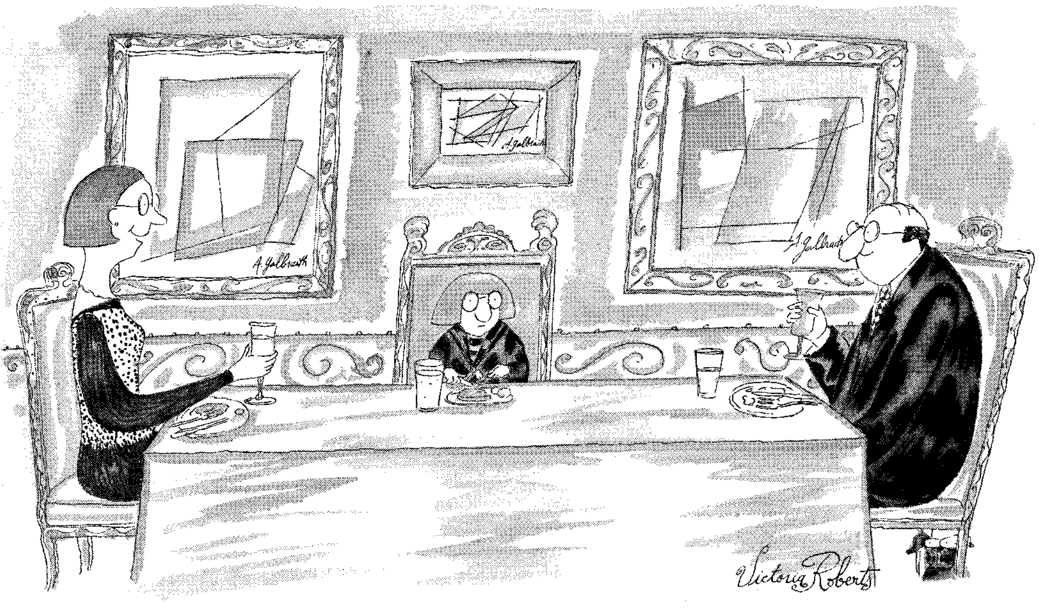
Daimler says this is realistic. Berlin isn't Düsseldorf or Munich; it isn't a rich man's city. Before the war, it was the biggest industrial city in Germany, and, despite the fact that most of its factories, which were mainly in the East, are now either bankrupt or closed, Berlin in the East is still a workers' city or, you could say, an unemployed workers' city. The fancy shops that went up last year on Friedrichstrasse—call it East Berlin's Fifth Avenue—are indeed full of East Berliners, but the truth is most of them are gawking, not buying.

"Renzo doesn't want a museum, he wants a place for the people," Ahlbrecht told me when I asked him about the McDonald's "M" and the action movies and the tacky retailers that share the platz with some of the most expensive new apartments in town. But Piano had planned the Potsdamer Platz as a way to link the city to itself, and the only thing that links it now is cheap champagne—five dollars a bottle at the Aldi discount supermarket in the mall basement—which everybody in Berlin buys. Piano had wanted people to be able to walk into the Potsdamer Platz from East Berlin, through the atrium of Daimler's twenty-one-story office tower and across a footbridge into Scharoun's public library. Today, you can enter the Daimler Tower, but a guard stops you at the back when you look for a door, and, in the event, there is no door. Right now, it doesn't matter anyway, since the library has refused to build one, too.

The problem, of course, is that there is really no such thing as "private public space," and, with Stimmann looking over one shoulder and Daimler looking over the other, Piano did as much as anyone could have to make the Potsdamer Platz a place you actually wanted to visit more than once. Not long ago, Richard Rogers gave a talk demanding to know why none of his friends (and, presumably, Rogers himself) had managed to do their best work in the new Berlin, and it made the front page of the Berlin papers. But when you compare the Daimler complex with the Sony Center under construction on the other side of Potsdamer Strasse, you begin to think of it as a triumph.

SONY is not known as a friend to architecture. Consider Philip Johnson's last great building in New York after Sony leased it from A.T. & T. and blocked its intricate, open galleries with stores. On the Potsdamer Platz, Sony never even tried to appear friendly. Its own master-plan competition was, to all intents and purposes, pro forma, since the company had already settled privately on Helmut Jahn, a German architect who lived and worked in Chicago, where he was best known for making "bold corporate statements." Jahn wasn't interested in variety. He didn't want any other architects working on Sony's eleven acres, and Sony had no trouble with the idea of a monolith. When the city complained, Sony threatened to take its losses and leave Berlin holding those empty acres. Jürgen Neffe, at *Der Spiegel*, says that Sony—along with its Berlin partner, the American developer Tishman Speyer—"more or less blackmailed and overran the city." All the elaborate rules about height and access and public space went by the wayside. Today, the Sony Center dominates the Potsdamer Platz. You could even say that it turns its back on the platz, with sheets of glass and steel so strident and repelling that you'd feel unwelcome even if you could find a way in.

No one ever accused Sony of sensitivity. It had no illusions about rediscovering the heart of Berlin on a bombed-out lot. (Jürgen Bruns-Berentelg, who runs Tishman's marketing operations in Germany, said that Sony was building for a "global city" and told me to look for the heart of Berlin someplace else, say the Brandenburg Gate.) Sony's idea of a pedestrian wasn't a Socratic stroller; there are no real streets through its eleven acres. And its idea of public space is eleven big screens of its own in the Potsdamer Platz and a "Sony Forum"—a massive atrium under a fan of steel blades—not for stores but for "image shops," where Sony and its tenants will, in a manner of speaking, sell themselves, with what promise to be high-tech "simulations" worthy of Goebbels selling



"Your father and I have decided to give half your allowance to BAM*."*

the image of “every young German on the open road in his own Volkswagen.”

IV.

THE publisher Michael Naumann, who is nine months into an impossible job as the country’s first Minister of Culture, thinks that Berlin expects too much of even its best architects. It expects them to bring “moral legitimacy” to what is, after all, a marketplace. It expects them to inspire the “discourse, tranquillity, philosophy, and perambulation” of a Renaissance Siena with twenty-five thousand people, a patrician class, and a strong faith that could locate its heart in a piazza because a cathedral was there. Naumann thinks that, somewhere into the nineteenth century and Hegel, Germany lost those “spiritual connections to place,” and tried to replace them with what you could call architectural emblems of connection—deifying German history with buildings about nationhood and power, which led to Speer’s fantasy of a Great Hall with a forum big enough for a million Germans voting yes on Hitler’s birthdays. He thinks that Germans should stop shouldering architects with the burden of German identity and should certainly stop “shouldering buildings with historical guilt,” or, for that matter, historical hope, and start looking at them as buildings.

Right now, the building that Naumann is looking at is Erich Honecker’s Palace of the Republic, at the top of Unter den Linden on Museum Island, the small island in the Spree that it shares with (among other Berlin landmarks) the Pergamon Museum and Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s great neoclassical Altes Museum. The palace has been closed for years—the city has been pumping so many tons of asbestos out of its walls and floors that it will be gutted soon—and Naumann wants the government to tear it down. No one had missed it until the East Berliners decided that it was *their* golden moment—a sentiment having mainly to do with memories of some public bowling alleys in the palace basement, a resident bartender who could make Manhattans, and the only functioning East-West phone booths in a city where you had to work for the Stasi to get a telephone of your own. People still referred to the square in front of it as the Schlossplatz, after the Hohenzollern Schloss. Naumann’s boss, Gerhard Schröder, who’ll be working in another building on the platz until his Chancellery is finished, seems to have echoed everybody else’s feelings when he took a look at the palace himself and announced, with characteristic tact, “This is so ugly! I’d rather see the Schloss.”

Eight years ago, a Prussia buff and farm-equipment entrepreneur from Hamburg named Wilhelm von Boddien—“I’m the John Deere of Germany,” he said by way of an introduction, and proved it by putting away a farmer’s breakfast at my hotel—decided that he was going to rebuild the Hohenzollern Schloss. He commissioned a monograph. He draped the Palace of the Republic with a fabric trompe-l’oeil facsimile of the old castle. He started making speeches and hustling investors and taking polls, which told him that people liked the castle. People thought it was pretty, they thought it was “Prussian.” He told those people that there had never been anything in Germany that was more Prussian, and he was right about that. The Schloss had grown and grown, as generations of Friedrichs and Wilhelms went to war and spread their power. It was the biggest building in Berlin besides the Tempelhof airport, a polyglot of four and a half centuries of Berlin architecture, with a bit of fifteenth-century castle keep here, a bit of Baroque (Andreas Schlüter, Nicodemus Tessin) there, a bit of some heavy court classicists it would be kinder to forget. Even Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, who is trying to save Honecker’s gutted Palace of the Republic, because “what you see there is impregnated with the hopes of the Left intellectuals in East Germany,” calls the Schloss the “beginning of Berlin architecture.” He says, “We live in a city where everything old is a variation of the castle, and the castle doesn’t exist.”

Naumann agrees with that part. He wants to see the castle rebuilt on the Schlossplatz. He says, with some reason, that if a wing of the Louvre were destroyed the French would find a way to rebuild it, and he thinks that, like the Louvre, the Schloss should be put to public use—as a Festhalle, as a government guest house, and as a library for Humboldt University, which has nowhere to put a humanities collection of two million books. Not surprisingly, von Boddien says, “Public use and commercial use are in my mind the same.” He’s thinking ninety-nine-year-lease for the developers. He’s thinking hotel; expensive European summits; offices for “status clients,” like Brussels and the multinationals; big parties (“Why not a press ball?” he asked me); and an “infrastructure” he describes as “only the shops to keep it going—perhaps you will need to buy a pullover or a pair of socks.”

One of the main architects of Ho-

“Actually, ‘Monkey see, monkey do’ has served me quite well in this market.”

THE HISTORY OF MY LIFE

Once upon a time there were two brothers.
Then there was only one: myself.

I grew up very fast, before learning to drive,
even. There was I: a stinking adult.

I thought of developing interests
someone might take an interest in. No soap.

I became very weepy for what had seemed
like the pleasant early years. As I aged

increasingly, I also grew more charitable
with regard to my thoughts and ideas,

thinking them at least as good as the next man's.
Then a great devouring cloud

came and loitered on the horizon, drinking
it up, for what seemed like months or years.

—John Ashbery

necker's Palace of the Republic is a man named Wolf Eisentraut. He lives in West Berlin now but still keeps busy in the East, trying to restore the housing projects in Marzahn and to build a museum out of an old Stasi surveillance station on top of Brocken Mountain, at the old border between the two Germanys. It goes without saying that Eisentraut likes his palace. He talks about the expensive construction, the waterproof concrete in the foundation. He wants you to know that the glass of the palace was "stamped with gold for reflecting the warm energy of the sun," and that it had a "great assembly hall," where Honecker held his Party Congresses, but also where people met for concerts and ballets and dancing. (He built a theatre in the palace, and for twelve years he came over at night to build the sets.) He wants you to try to think of the palace as "a living place for the people in East Berlin," and not of the way it is now, "closed, dark, and dirty." There is probably no one outside East Berlin who cares about that palace, but there is something touching about the way Eisentraut talks about the West's contempt for anything built in the East. He told me, "Look, this is what we did with what we had. We did our best."

Everybody wants something to fill the Schlossplatz, and, from the planners' perspective, this makes it the one big issue open, now that, for better or worse, the subject of the government center and the Potsdamer Platz is closed. Berliners call the Schlossplatz the last void, despite the fact that a mile of Unter den Linden separates it from what was once the Wall, and even despite the fact that there is something there. The architect Michael Mussotter—who, with his partner, Ulrike Poeverlein, entered one of the Schlossplatz competitions with a beautiful black steel bridge designed to curve slowly over the Spree, catching the movement of the water in aluminum panels, but lost to a "Berlin-concept" stone bridge that came with lanterns—thinks that the city should live with its void for a while, or put in something pointedly temporary, like an amusement park or a farmers' market. "Not a dull historical wrapping," Mussotter says, "but something to preserve at least some of that cheap, messy, hybrid, intermediate space that's Berlin right now." Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, the city's reigning conceptual artists, have another idea for the Schlossplatz. Their idea is a building with a little bit of every Berlin in it—a little Hohenzollern facing north to the Altes Museum, a little Honecker facing east to the park called Marx-Engels Forum, maybe even a little Sony global. "A psychogram of history," Schnock says. "But not a memorial to the past," Stih adds. "Prussia failed. East Germany failed. A memorial for whom?"

It seems to me now, watching the city change, that for Berliners the real void remains that terrible moment in the city's history that Stih and Schnock themselves confronted in the mid-nineties, when they filled the old Jewish neighborhood of Schöneberg with signs—eighty aluminum silk screens that traced the laws against Berlin's Jews, from the first ordinances forbidding Jews to sing in choirs or use the public beaches to the order, issued on February 16, 1945, that read, "All files involving anti-Semitic activity are to be destroyed." Today, you can feel that moment lurking in all the other Berlin moments—in the space that architecture is being asked to fill. It's no accident, when you think of it, that the most powerful building to go up in Berlin in the past ten years is also the only building to occupy that moment directly, like the Schöneberg signs, and not try to transcend it or memorialize it or, indeed, resolve the conundrum of identity for the Jews of Berlin—the assimilated bourgeois Jews who lived in places like Schöneberg and thought that, being German, they could survive it. The building is Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum.

The museum sits on the edge of Kreuzberg, where most of the Turkish immigrants in Berlin live now, next to (and connected by tunnel to) the small Baroque courthouse that houses the Berlin Museum. Libeskind won the competition for it a few months before the Wall fell, thus sparing himself, as he puts it, the strong likelihood that "a year later they would have said, 'We don't need it.'" (One director of the Berlin Museum was so worried about historical turf that he fought to keep the Jewish Museum's original official name: Extension of the Berlin Museum with the Jewish Museum Department.) It's a literally shattering structure. Some people think it's a thunderbolt, and some a Star of David, deconstructed and waiting to cohere. It's zinc on the outside, concrete and slate inside, and slashed by narrow windows that are actually the architect's own careful topography of Berlin—"the map of an absence," he says. It has long white galleries that are interrupted by voids—seven looming, vertiginous, vertical spaces that stop the building in its tracks and, of course, are another way of saying absence.

Libeskind lives in Berlin, but he doesn't come from Berlin. He was born in Lodz, and his parents, who emigrated to Israel when he was eleven and eventually settled in the Bronx, were Polish Jews who had managed to get to Russia and survive the war. There are Berliners today, including Jewish Berliners, who say that his museum is "too Polish." They are involved in a very "Berlin" revisionism. They want you to know that more than half of Germany's Jews were able to leave Germany. They remind you that "only" two hundred thousand German Jews were murdered, compared to three million Polish Jews, and I have even heard Jewish friends describe the museum, only half in jest, as "the revenge of the Polish Jews"—as if the Final Solution were something directed against the caftaned, ghetto Jew of Hitler's fantasies, and only incidentally devolved on them. They talk about the "special continuity" of a Jewish community that dates from the fourth century, and that since the war has begun to flourish again. They want a Jewish Museum in Berlin to be "positive," to concentrate on the life and times of that admittedly illustrious community—there were no more than a hundred and seventy thousand Jews in Berlin when Hitler came to power, and their contribution had been enormous—instead of talking about voids. They are scared of backlash, scared, with some reason, of anti-Semitism. They have the Berlin problem. Like other Berliners, they want their architecture to fill voids instead of making them.

Most Berliners are dazzled, though. "We're in the imagination of Berliners," Libeskind tells me. His museum sits next to its Baroque courthouse in a kind of wild harmony, giving the lie to any "Berlin concept," proving that the best thing about cities is that cities change, cities fool you, cities are surprising. The museum is empty now and won't open with an exhibition for another year and a half, but on two nights last winter, when it was open to the public, eight thousand people came. Today, Berliners line up on the street for tours. It's impossible to spend five minutes in the silence of what Libeskind calls the Holocaust void—ninety feet of blackness making a kind of upward plummet to a patch of light in a tiny window too far away for hope and at the same time close enough to imagine hope—without seeing someone walk, blinking, toward a corner of the walls that enclose him, reach out, and begin to cry. Libeskind himself says that the point of his building isn't absence: it's sixty or seventy thousand square feet of exhibition space that will hold a world and the inexplicable fact of that corner. It's about bringing real history to life in a city that still seems more comfortable with the idea of monuments to dead Jews—like the Holocaust Memorial under so much discussion now—than with the tragic complexities of its own interrupted and ongoing Jewish story. The Bundestag just voted to build that memorial: twenty-seven hundred stone slabs on five acres. A historic moment, politicians said. In German, the word is *Sternstunde*—"star hour"—and it's another way of saying golden moment.

Berlin, of course, will keep fighting over its golden moments. The burning issue in the city right now has less to do with keeping German soldiers in Kosovo than with whether calling the Reichstag "the Federal Parliament Plenary Chamber of the Former Imperial Diet Building"—last month's name—will settle its past into history. The city hangs up subway signs with "Reichstag," and the government orders signs with "Bundestag" for the buses, and people from each side of the argument have been known to change the signs that the other side installed. In a way, that's not really any different from the Berlin Museum fighting about whether to call the Jewish Museum a "department," or a "with" or an "in" or any of the other names it came up with when it was still trying to make Berlin's Jewish history just one more golden moment in the city's life. The lesson of Libeskind's building is that Berlin isn't about meaning. It's not a memorial. It isn't a symbol. Like the Wall ten years ago, it's *there*. Live with it. ♦

DOWN THE RUNWAY

THINGS TO COME

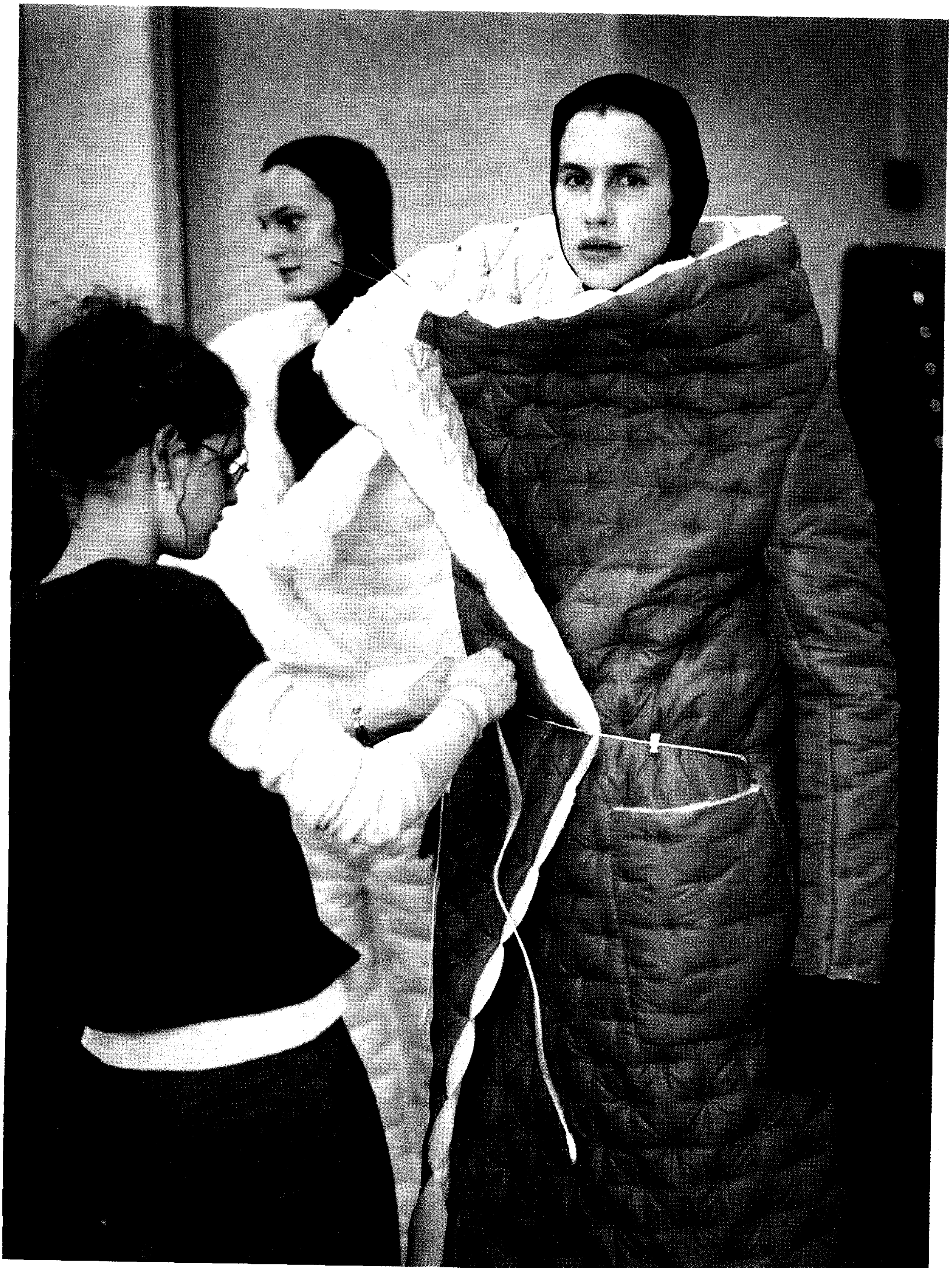
TAKE one part Buzz Lightyear. Add two parts Kenny from "South Park." Decorate with toxic colors and as much dead animal as polite society will allow. ("The Americans are back into fur, but the British won't touch it," a Milanese press person said recently.) And *voilà!* This is the unlikely recipe for fall menswear from designers in Milan, Paris, London, and New York, all of whom are returning to the catwalk this month—well before an autumnal cape, catsuit, or sci-fi anorak has hit the stores—to present their fashionable looks for spring.

"Catsuits are the perfect first layering. They should be like your skin. Then you put your shirt and jacket over the top," says the Belgian designer Walter Van Beirendonck, who has been known to go over the top himself. At the showing of his fall collection, in Paris, Van Beirendonck put toys in the front row instead of members of the press, and he put space helmets on his models, lending them the unmistakable look of Teletubbies.

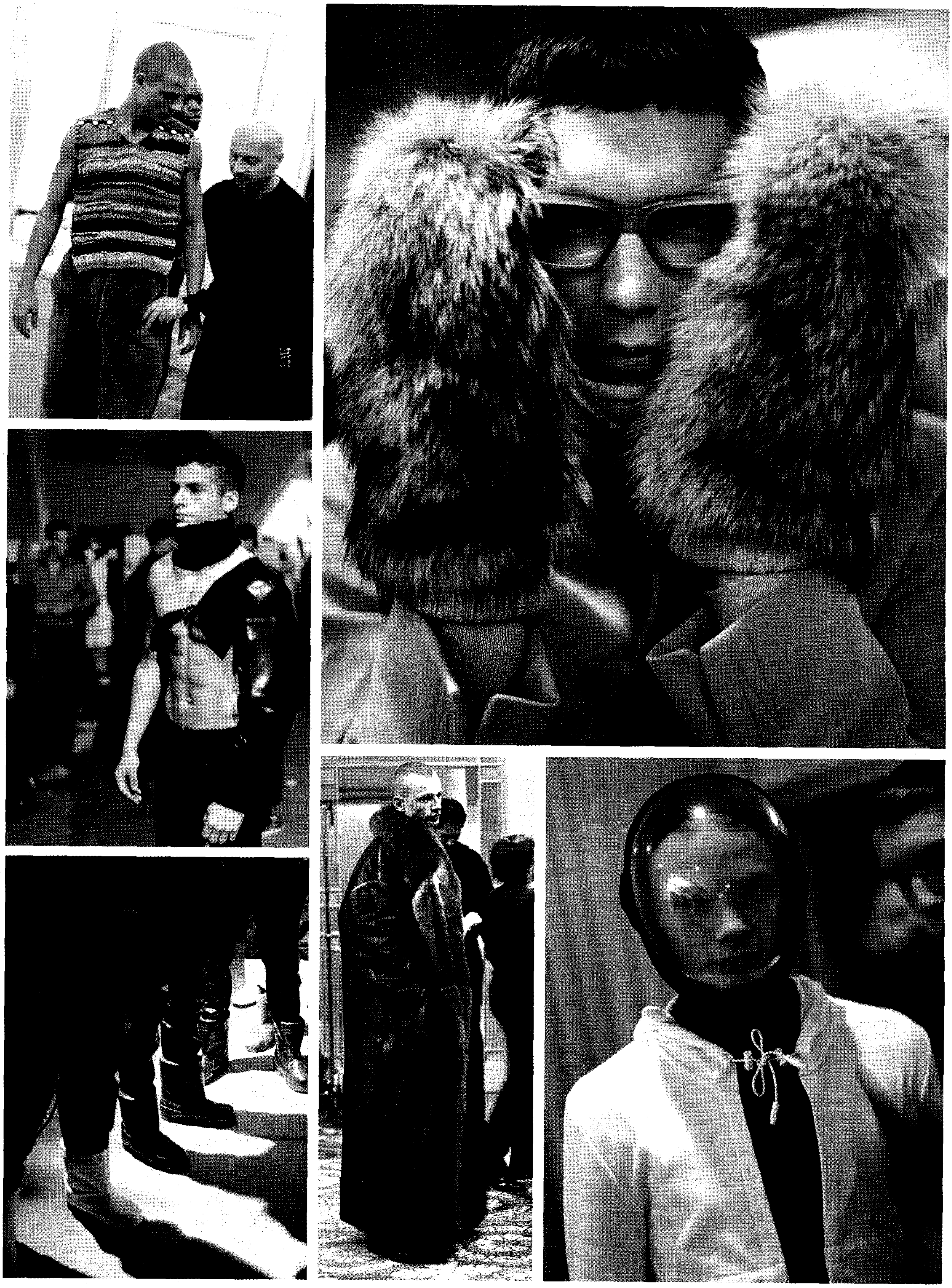
In Milan, which emphasized furrier kinds of thermonuclear chic, D^2 (the twin Canadian designers Dean and Dan Caten) added shaggy yeti boots to futuristic anoraks and accessorized with leather armor ("Like a gladiator, only modern," they explained). For the millennium ("It's cool that we're going into a new decade or whatever"), the twins plan to "mix motocross with matador."

Gianfranco Ferré, also thinking ahead, rifled through piles of sketches in his Milan atelier and pulled out a Polaroid of his Big New Menswear Notion for next spring. "Thick jersey. Following the body," he said, indicating what appeared to be some spectacularly tight spaceman's long johns. But what about suits? "Those are not newsy for a big line like mine," he said. "This is the future." If so, it is a future without serviceable suits or sensible sports coats for those of us about to be carted off to the Buck Rogers Home for Distressed Gentlefolk. —M.R.

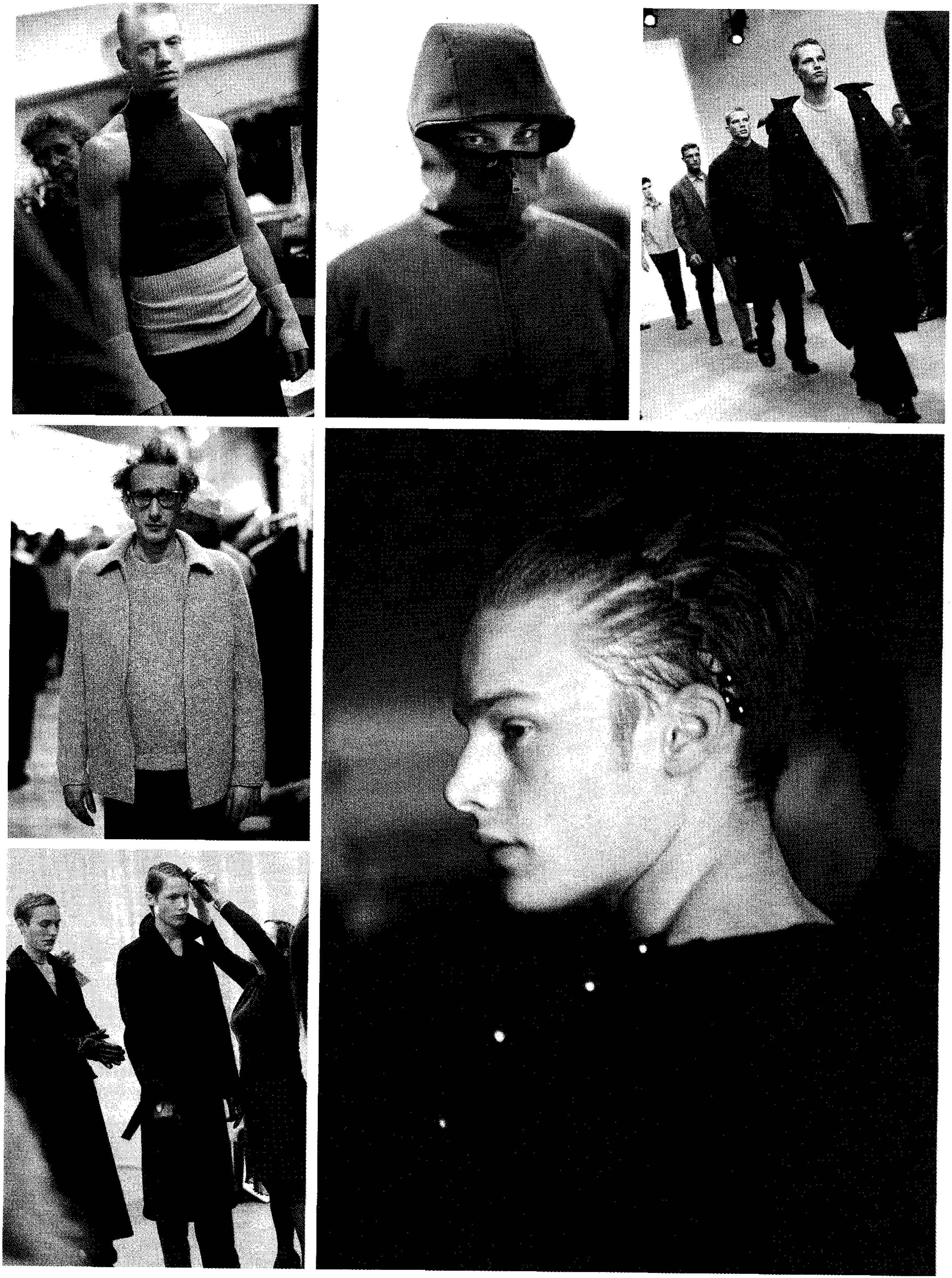
Photographs by Michael Roberts



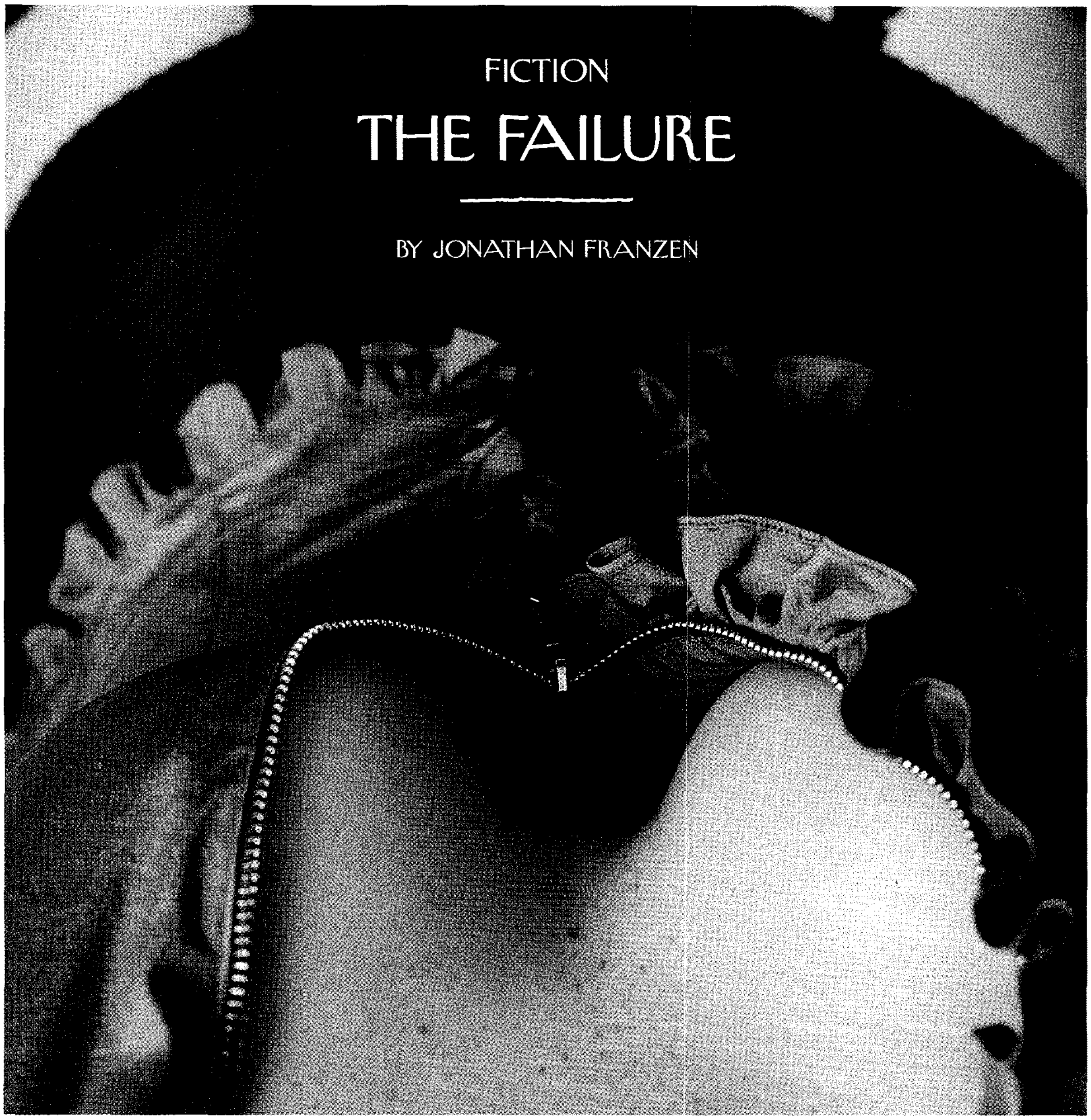
Models in the Belgian designer Walter Van Beirendonck's well-insulated millennial look for fall being prepared for the catwalk.



Clockwise from top left: Domenico Dolce adjusting a model wearing Dolce & Gabbana fur trousers; fur mitts by Gianfranco Ferré; Walter Van Beirendonck's Teletubbyesque helmet; furry maxi-coats are the thing at Fendi; a parade of astronaut boots by Dirk Bikkembergs; leather armor by D^2 *("It's a utility look but fun," they say. "We're not serious kind of guys").*



Clockwise from top left: Giorgio Armani's unusual combination of halter-neck knit and cummerbund; Prada's "South Park"-inspired anorak; Calvin Klein's military chic, single file; a metal hairband by José Lévy; Yves Saint Laurent's revival of David Bowie's Thin White Duke look; a model in Hermès knitwear, recalling both Woody Allen and Roberto Benigni.



FICTION

THE FAILURE

BY JONATHAN FRANZEN

DOWN the long concourse they came unsteadily, Enid favoring her damaged hip, Alfred paddling at the air with loose-hinged hands and slapping the airport carpeting with poorly controlled feet, both of them carrying Nordic Pleasurelines shoulder bags and concentrating on the floor in front of them, measuring out the hazardous distance three paces at a time. To anyone who saw them averting their eyes from the dark-haired New Yorkers careering past them, to anyone who caught a glimpse of Alfred's straw fedora looming at the height of Iowa corn on Labor Day, or the yellow wool of the slacks stretching over Enid's outslung hip, it was obvious that they were Midwestern and intimidated. But to Chip Lambert, who was waiting for them just beyond the security checkpoint, they were killers.

Chip had crossed his arms defensively and raised one hand to pull on the wrought-iron rivet in his ear. He worried that he might tear the rivet right out of his earlobe—that the maximum pain his ear's nerves could generate was less pain than he needed now to steady himself. From his station by the metal detectors he watched an azure-haired girl overtake his parents, an azure-haired girl of college age, a very wantable stranger with pierced lips and eyebrows. It struck him that if he could have sex with this girl for one second he could face his parents confidently, and that if he could keep on having sex with this girl once every minute for as long as his parents were in town he could survive their entire visit. Chip was a tall, gym-built man with crow's-feet and sparse butter-yellow hair; if the girl had noticed him, she might have thought he was a little too old for the leather he was wearing. As she hurried past him, he pulled harder on his rivet to offset the pain of her departure from his life forever and to focus his attention on his father, whose face was brightening at the discovery of a son among so many strangers. In the lunging manner of a man floundering in water, Alfred fell upon Chip and grabbed Chip's hand and wrist as if they were a rope he'd been thrown. "Well!" he said. "Well!"

Enid came limping up behind him.

"Chip," she cried, "what have you done to your *ears*?"

"Dad, Mom," Chip murmured through his teeth, hoping the azure-haired girl was out of earshot. "Good to see you."

He had time for one subversive thought about his parents' Nordic Pleasurelines shoulder bags—either Nordic Pleasurelines sent bags like these to every booker of its cruises as a cynical means of getting inexpensive walk-about publicity or as a practical means of tagging the cruise participants for greater ease of handling at embarkation points or as a benign means of building esprit de corps; or else Enid and Alfred had deliberately saved the bags from some previous Nordic Pleasurelines cruise and, out of a misguided sense of loyalty, had chosen to carry them on their upcoming cruise as well; and in either case Chip was appalled by his parents' willingness to make themselves vectors of corporate advertising—before he shouldered the bags himself and assumed the burden of seeing LaGuardia Airport and New York City and his life and clothes and body through the disappointed eyes of his parents.

He noticed, as if for the first time, the dirty linoleum, the assassinlike chauffeurs holding up signs with other people's names on them, the snarl of wires dangling from a hole in the ceiling. He distinctly heard the word "motherfucker." Outside the big windows on the baggage level, two Bangladeshi men were pushing a disabled cab through rain and angry honking.

"We have to be at the pier by four," Enid said to Chip. "And I think Dad was hoping to see your desk at the *Wall Street Journal.*" She raised her voice. "Al? Al?"

Though stooped in the neck now, Alfred was still an imposing figure. His hair was white and thick and sleek, like a polar bear's, and the powerful long muscles of his shoulders, which Chip remembered laboring in the spanking of a child, usually Chip himself, still filled the gray tweed shoulders of his sports coat.

"Al, didn't you say you wanted to see where Chip worked?" Enid shouted.

Alfred shook his head. "There's no time."

The baggage carrousel circulated nothing.

"Did you take your pill?" Enid said.

"Yes," Alfred said. He closed his eyes and repeated slowly, "I took my pill. I took my pill. I took my pill."

"Dr. Hedgpeth has him on a new medication," Enid explained to Chip, who was quite certain that his father had not, in fact, expressed interest in seeing his office. And since Chip had no association with the *Wall Street Journal*—the publication to which he made unpaid contributions was the *Warren Street Journal: A Monthly of the Transgressive Arts;* he'd also very recently completed a screenplay, and he'd been working part-time as a legal proofreader at Bragg Knuter & Speigh for the nearly two years since he'd lost his assistant professorship in Renaissance Studies and Critical Theory at C—— College, in Connecticut, as a result of an offense involving a female undergraduate which had fallen just short of the legally actionable, and which, though his parents never learned of it, had interrupted the parade of accomplishments that his mother could brag about, back home in St. Jude; he'd told his parents that he'd quit teaching in order to pursue a career in writing, and when, more recently, his mother had pressed him for details, he'd mentioned the *Warren Street Journal*, the name of which his mother had misheard and instantly begun to trumpet to her friends Esther Root and Bea Meisner and Mary Beth Schumpert, and though Chip in his monthly phone calls home had had many opportunities to disabuse her he'd instead actively fostered the misunderstanding; and here things became rather complex, not only because the *Wall Street Journal* was available in St. Jude and his mother had never mentioned looking for his work and failing to find it (meaning that some part of her knew perfectly well that he didn't write for the paper) but also because the author of articles like "Consensual Incest" and "Self/Abuse" was conspiring to preserve, in his mother, precisely the kind of illusion that the *Warren Street Journal* was dedicated to exploding, and he was thirty-nine years old, and he blamed his parents for the person he had become—he was happy when his mother let the subject drop.

"His tremor's much better," Enid added in a voice inaudible to Alfred. "The only side effect is that he *may* hallucinate."

"That's quite a side effect," Chip said.

"Dr. Hedgpeth says that what he has is very mild and almost completely controllable with medication."

Alfred was surveying the baggage-claim cavern while pale travellers angled for position at the carrousel. There was a confusion of tread patterns on the linoleum, gray with the pollutants that the rain had brought down. The light was the color of car sickness. "New York City!" Alfred said.

Enid frowned at Chip's pants. "Those aren't *leather*, are they?"

"Yes."

"How do you wash them?"

"They're leather. They're like a second skin."

"We have to be at the pier no later than four o'clock," Enid said.

The carrousel coughed up some suitcases.

"Chip, help me," his father said.

Soon Chip was staggering out into the wind-blown rain with all four of his parents' bags. Alfred shuffled after him with the jerking momentum of a man who knew there would be trouble if he had to stop and start again. Enid lagged behind, intent on the pain in her hip. She'd put on weight and maybe lost a little height since Chip had last seen her. She'd always been a pretty woman, but to Chip she was so much a personality and so little anything else that even staring straight at her he had no idea what she really looked like.

"What's that—wrought iron?" Alfred asked him as the taxi line crept forward.

"Yes," Chip said, touching his ear.

"Looks like an old quarter-inch rivet."

"Yes."

"What do you do—crimp that? Hammer it?"

"It's hammered," Chip said.

Alfred winced and gave a low, inhaling whistle.

"We're doing a Luxury Fall Color Cruise," Enid said when the three of them were in a yellow cab, speeding through Queens. "We sail up to Quebec, and then we enjoy the changing leaves all the way back down to Newport. Dad so enjoyed the last cruise we were on. Didn't you, Al? Didn't you have a good time on that cruise?"

The brick palisades of the East River waterfront were taking an angry beating from the rain. Chip could have wished for a sunny day, a clear view of landmarks and blue water, with nothing to hide. The only colors on the road this morning were the smeared reds of brake lights.

"This is one of the great cities of the world," Alfred said with emotion.

"How are you feeling these days, Dad," Chip managed to ask.

"Any better I'd be in Heaven, any worse I'd be in Hell."

"We're excited about your new job," Enid said.

"One of the great papers in the country," Alfred said. "The *Wall Street Journal*."

"Does anybody smell fish, though?"

"We're near the ocean," Chip said.

"No, it's you." Enid leaned and buried her face in Chip's leather jacket. "Your jacket smells *strongly* of fish."

He wrenched free of her. "Mother. Please."

CHIP'S problem was a loss of confidence. Gone were the days when he could afford to *épater les bourgeois*. Except for his Manhattan apartment and his handsome girlfriend, Julia Vrais, he now had almost nothing to persuade himself that he was a functioning male adult, no accomplishments to compare with those of his sister, Denise, who at the age of thirty-two was the executive chef and co-owner of a large new high-end restaurant in Philadelphia. Chip had hoped he might have sold his screenplay by now, but he hadn't finished a draft until after midnight on Tuesday, and then he'd had to work three fourteen-hour shifts at Bragg Knuter & Speigh to raise cash to pay his August rent and reassure his landlord about his September and October rent, and then there was a lunch to be shopped for and an apartment to be cleaned and, finally, sometime before dawn this morning, a long-hoarded Xanax to be swallowed. Meanwhile, nearly a week had gone by without his seeing Julia or speaking to her directly. In response to the many nervous messages he'd left on her voice mail in the last forty-eight hours, asking her to meet him and his parents and Denise at his apartment at noon on Saturday and also, please, if possible, not to mention to his parents that she was married to someone else, Julia had maintained a total phone and E-mail silence from which even a more stable man than Chip might have drawn disturbing conclusions.

It was raining so hard in Manhattan that water was streaming down façades and frothing at the mouths of sewers. Outside his building, on East Ninth Street, Chip took money from Enid and handed it through the cab's partition, and even as the turbaned driver thanked him he realized the tip was too small. From his own wallet he took two singles and dangled them near the driver's shoulder.

"That's enough, that's enough," Enid squeaked, reaching for Chip's wrist. "He already said thank you."

But the money was gone. Alfred was trying to open the door by pulling on the window crank. "Here, Dad, it's this one," Chip said and leaned across him to pop the door.

"How big a tip was that?" Enid asked Chip on the sidewalk, under his building's marquee, as the driver heaved luggage from the trunk.

"About fifteen per cent," Chip said.

"More like twenty, I'd say," Enid said.

"Let's have a fight about this, why don't we."

"Twenty per cent's too much, Chip," Alfred pronounced in a booming voice. "It's not reasonable."

"You all have a good day now," the taxi-driver said with no apparent irony.

"A tip is for service and comportment," Enid said. "If the service and comportment are especially good I might give fifteen per cent. But if you *automatically* tip—"

"I've suffered from depression all my life," Alfred said, or seemed to say.

"Excuse me?" Chip said.

"Depression years changed me. They changed the meaning of a dollar."

"An economic depression, we're talking about."

"Then when the service really *is* especially good or especially bad," Enid pursued, "there's no way to express it monetarily."

"A dollar is still a lot of money," Alfred said.

"Fifteen per cent if the service is exceptional, really exceptional."

"I'm wondering why we're having this particular conversation," Chip said to his mother. "Why this conversation and not some other conversation."

"We're both terribly anxious," Enid replied, "to see where you work."

Chip's doorman, Zoroaster, hurried out to help with the luggage and installed the Lamberts in the building's balky elevator. Enid said, "I ran into your old friend Dean Driblett at the bank the other day. I never run into Dean but where he doesn't ask about you. He was impressed with your new writing job."

"Dean Driblett was a classmate, not a friend," Chip said.

"He and his wife just had their fourth child. I told you, didn't I, they built that *enormous* house out in Paradise Valley—Al, didn't you count eight bedrooms?"

Alfred gave her a steady, unblinking look. Chip leaned on the Door Close button.

"Dean's mother Honey and I are good friends, you know," Enid said, "and Dad and I were at the housewarming in June. It was spectacular. They'd had it catered, and they had *pyramids* of shrimp. It was solid shrimp, in pyramids. I've never seen anything like it."

"Pyramids of shrimp," Chip said. The elevator door finally closed.

"Anyway, it's a beautiful house," Enid said. "There are at least six bedrooms, and, you know, it looks like they're going to fill them. Dean's tremendously successful. He started that lawn-care business when he decided the mortuary business wasn't for him, well, you know, Dale Driblett's his stepdad, *you* know, the Driblett Chapel, and now his billboards are everywhere and he's started an H.M.O. I saw in the paper where it's the fastest-growing H.M.O. in St. Jude, it's called DeeDeeCare, same as the lawn-care business, and there are billboards for the H.M.O. now, too. He's quite the entrepreneur, *I'd* say."

"Slo-o-o-o-w elevator," Alfred said.

"This is a prewar building," Chip explained in a tight voice. "An extremely desirable building."

"But you know what he told me he's doing for his mother's birthday? It's still a surprise for her, but I can tell you. He's taking her to Paris for eight days. Two first-class tickets, eight nights at the Ritz! That's the kind of person Dean is, very family-oriented. But can you believe that kind of birthday present? Al, didn't you say the house alone

"I got the part, but I play a waiter."

• •

probably cost a million dollars? Al?"

"It's a large house but cheaply done," Alfred said with sudden vigor. "The walls are like paper."

"All the new houses are like that," Enid said.

"You asked me if I was impressed with the house. I thought it was ostentatious. I thought the shrimp was ostentatious. It was poor."

"It may have been frozen," Enid said.

"People are easily impressed with things like that," Alfred said. "They'll talk for months about the pyramids of shrimp. Well, see for yourself," he said to Chip, as to a neutral bystander. "Your mother's still talking about it."

For a moment Chip was tempted to believe that his father had become a likable old stranger; but he knew Alfred, underneath, to be a shouter and a punisher. The last time Chip had visited his parents in St. Jude, four years earlier, he'd taken along his then-girlfriend Ruthie, a peroxided young Marxist from the North of England, who, after committing numberless offenses against Enid's sensibilities (she lit a cigarette indoors, laughed out loud at Enid's favorite watercolors of Buckingham Palace, came to dinner without a bra, and failed to take even one bite of the "salad" of water chestnuts and green peas and cheddar-cheese cubes in a thick mayonnaise sauce which Enid made for festive occasions), had needled and baited Alfred until he pronounced that "the blacks" would be the ruination of this country, "the blacks" were incapable of coexisting with whites, they expected the government to take care of them, they didn't know the meaning of hard work, what they lacked above all was *discipline*, it was going to end with slaughter in the streets, *with slaughter in the streets*, and he didn't give a damn what Ruthie thought of him, she was a visitor in *his* house and *his* country, and she had no right to criticize things she didn't understand; whereupon Chip, who'd already warned Ruthie that his parents were the squarest people in America, had smiled at her as if to say, *You see? Exactly as advertised.* Coincidentally or not, Ruthie had dumped him two weeks later.

"Al," Enid said as the elevator lurched to a halt, "you have to admit that it was a very, very nice party, and that it was *very* nice of Dean to invite us."

Alfred seemed not to have heard her.

Propped outside Chip's apartment was a clear-plastic umbrella that Chip recognized, with relief, as Julia Vrais's. He was herding the parental luggage from the elevator when his apartment door swung open and Julia herself stepped out. "Oh. Oh!" she said, as though flustered. "You're early!"

By Chip's watch it was eleven-thirty-five. Julia was wearing a shapeless lavender raincoat and holding a DreamWorks tote bag. Her hair, which was long and the color of dark chocolate, was big with humidity and rain. In the tone of a person being friendly to large animals she said "Hi" to Alfred and "Hi," separately, to Enid. Alfred and Enid bayed their names at her and extended hands to shake, driving her back into the apartment, where Enid began to pepper her with questions in which Chip, as he followed with the luggage, could hear subtexts and agendas.

"Do you live in the city?" Enid said. (*You're not cohabiting with our son, are you?*) "And you work in the city, too?" (*You are gainfully employed? You're not from an alien, snobbish, moneyed Eastern family?*) "Did you grow up here?" (*Or do you come from a trans-Appalachian state where people are warmhearted and down-to-earth and unlikely to be Jewish?*) "Oh, and do you still have family in Ohio?" (*Have your parents perhaps taken the morally dubious modern step of getting divorced?*) "Do you have brothers or sisters?" (*Are you a spoiled only child or a Catholic with a zillion siblings?*)

Julia having passed this initial examination, Enid turned her attention to the apartment. Chip, in a late crisis of confidence, had bought a stain-removal kit and lifted the big semen stain off the red chaise lounge, dismantled the wall of wine-bottle corks with which he'd been bricking in the niche above his fireplace at a rate of half a dozen Merlots and Pinot Grigios a week, taken down from his bathroom wall the photographs of semi-erect penises which were the flower of his art collection, and replaced them with the three diplomas that Enid had long ago insisted on having framed for him.

"This is about the size of Dean Driblett's bathroom," Enid said. "Wouldn't you say, Al?"

Alfred rotated his bobbing hands and examined their dorsal sides.

"I'd never seen such an enormous bathroom."

"Enid, you have no tact," Alfred said.

It might have occurred to Chip that

this, too, was a tactless remark, since it implied that his father concurred in his mother's criticism of the apartment and objected only to her airing of it. But Chip was unable to focus on anything but the hair dryer protruding from Julia's DreamWorks tote bag. It was the hair dryer that she kept in his bathroom. She seemed, actually, to be heading out the door.

"Dean and Trish have a whirlpool *and* a shower stall *and* a tub, all separate," Enid went on. "The sinks are his 'n' hers."

"Chip, I'm sorry," Julia said.

He raised a hand to put her on hold. "We're going to have lunch here as soon as Denise comes," he announced to his parents. "It's a very simple lunch. Just make yourselves at home."

"It was nice to meet you both," Julia called to Enid and Alfred. To Chip in a lower voice she said, "Denise will be here. You'll be fine."

She opened the door.

"Mom, Dad," Chip said, "just one second."

He followed Julia out of the apartment and let the door fall shut behind him.

"This is really unfortunate timing," he said. "Just really, really unfortunate."

Julia shook her hair back off her temples. "I'm feeling good about the fact that it's the first time in my life I've ever acted self-interestedly in a relationship."

"That's nice. That's a big step." Chip made an effort to smile. "But what about the script? Is Eden reading it?"

"I think maybe this weekend sometime."

"What about you?"

"I read, um," Julia looked away, "most of it."

"My idea," Chip said, "was to have this 'hump' that the moviegoer has to get over. Putting something off-putting at the beginning, it's a classic modernist strategy. There's a lot of rich suspense toward the end."

Julia turned toward the elevator and didn't reply.

"*Did* you get to the end yet?" Chip asked.

"Oh, Chip," she burst out miserably, "your script starts off with a six-page lecture about anxieties of the phallus in Tudor drama!"

He was aware of this. Indeed, for weeks now, he'd been awakening most nights before dawn, his stomach churning and his teeth clenched, and had wrestled with the nightmarish certainty that a long academic monologue on Tudor drama had no place in Act I of a commercial script. Often it took him hours—took getting out of bed, pacing around, drinking vodka—to regain his conviction that a theory-driven opening monologue was not only not a mistake but the script's most powerful selling point; and now, with a single glance at Julia, he could see that he was wrong.

Nodding in heartfelt agreement with her criticism, he opened the door of his apartment and called to his parents, "One second, Mom, Dad. Just one second." As he shut the door again, however, the old arguments came back to him. "You see, though," he said, "the entire story is prefigured in that monologue. Every single theme is there in capsule form—gender, power, identity, authenticity—and the thing is . . . wait. Wait. Julia?"

Bowing her head sheepishly, as though she'd somehow hoped he wouldn't notice she was leaving, Julia turned away from the elevator and back toward him.

"The thing is," he said, "the girl is sitting in the front row of the classroom *listening* to the lecture. The fact that *he* is controlling the discourse—"

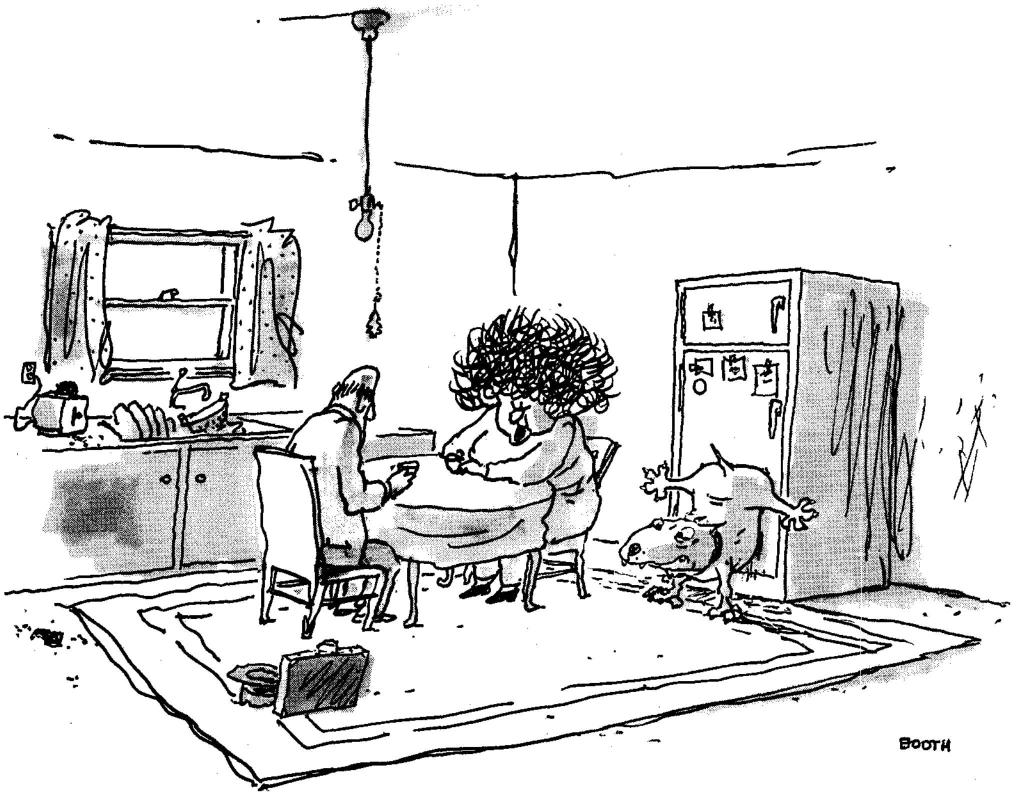
"And it's a little creepy, though," Julia said, "the way you keep talking about her breasts."

This, too, was true. That it was true, however, seemed unfair and cruel to Chip, who would never have had the heart to write the script at all without the lure of imagining the breasts of his young female lead. "You're probably right," he said. "Although some of the physicality there is intentional. Because that's the irony, see, that she's attracted to his mind while he's attracted to her—"

"But for a woman reading it," Julia said obstinately, "it's sort of like the poultry department. Breast, breast, breast, thigh, leg."

"I can remove some of those references," Chip said in a low voice. "I can also shorten the opening lecture. The thing is, though, I want there to be a 'hump'—"

"Right, for the moviegoer to get over. That's a neat idea."



"The dog ate my magnetic insoles."

"Please come and have lunch. Please. Julia?"

The elevator door had opened at her touch.

"I'm saying it's a tiny bit insulting to a person somehow."

"But that's not you. It's not even based on you."

"Oh, great. It's somebody else's breasts."

"Jesus. Please. One second." Chip turned back to his apartment door and opened it, and this time he was startled to find himself face to face with his father. Alfred's big hands were shaking violently.

"Dad, hi, just another minute here."

"Chip," Alfred said, "ask her to stay! Tell her we want her to stay!"

Chip nodded and closed the door in the old man's face; but in the few seconds that his back had been turned the elevator swallowed Julia. He punched the call button, to no avail, and then opened the fire door and ran down the spiral of the service stairwell. *After a series of effulgent lectures celebrating the unfettered pursuit of pleasure as a strategy of subverting the bureaucracy of rationalism, BILL QUAINTENCE, an attractive young professor of Renaissance Studies and Critical Theory, is seduced by his beautiful and adoring student MONA. Their wildly erotic affair has hardly begun, however, when they are discovered by BILL'S estranged wife, HILLAIRE. In a tense confrontation representing the clash of Therapeutic and Transgressive world views, BILL and HILLAIRE struggle for the soul of young MONA, who lies naked between them on tangled sheets. HILLAIRE succeeds in seducing MONA with her crypto-repressive rhetoric, and MONA publicly denounces BILL. BILL loses his job but soon discovers E-mail records proving that HILLAIRE has given MONA money to ruin his career. As BILL is driving to see his lawyer with a diskette containing the incriminating evidence, his car is run off the road into the raging C—— River, and the diskette floats free of the sunken car and is borne by ceaseless, indomitable currents into the raging, erotic/chaotic open sea, and the crash is ruled vehicular suicide, and in the film's final scenes HILLAIRE is hired to replace BILL on the faculty and is seen lecturing on the evils of unfettered pleasure to a classroom in which is seated her diabolical lesbian lover, MONA.* This was the one-page précis that Chip had assembled with the aid of store-bought screenwriting manuals and had faxed, one winter morning, to a Manhattan-based film producer named Eden Procuro. Five minutes later he'd answered his phone to the cool, blank voice of a young woman saying, "Please hold for Eden Procuro," followed by Eden Procuro herself crying, "I love it, love it, love it, love it, *love* it!" But now a year and a half had passed. Now the one-page précis had become a hundred-and-twenty-four-page script called "The Academy Purple," and now Julia Vrais, the chocolate-haired owner of that cool, blank personal assistant's voice, was running away from him, and as he raced downstairs to intercept her, planting his feet sidewise to take the steps three and four at a time, grabbing the newel at each landing and reversing his trajectory with a jerk, all he could see or think of was a damning entry in his nearly photographic mental concordance of those hundred and twenty-four pages:

3: bee-stung lips, high round **breasts**, narrow hips and
3: over the cashmere sweater that snugly hugs her **breasts**
4: forward raptly, her perfect adolescent **breasts** eagerly
8: (eying her **breasts**)
9: (eying her **breasts**)
9: (his eyes drawn helplessly to her perfect **breasts**)
11: (eying her **breasts**)
12: (mentally fondling her perfect **breasts**)
15: (eying and eying her perfect adolescent **breasts**)
23: (clinch, her perfect **breasts** surging against his
24: the repressive bra to unfetter her subversive **breasts**.)
28: to pinkly tongue one sweat-sheened **breast**.)
29: phallically jutting nipple of her sweat-drenched **breast**
29: I like your **breasts**.
30: absolutely adore your honeyed, heavy **breasts**.
33: (HILLAIRE'S **breasts**, like twin Gestapo bullets, can be
36: barbed glare as if to puncture and deflate her **breasts**
44: Arcadian **breasts** with stern puritanical terry cloth and
45: cowering, ashamed, the towel clutched to her **breasts**.)
76: her guileless **breasts** shrouded now in militaristic
83: I miss your mouth, I miss your perfect **breasts**, I
117: drowned headlights fading like two milk-white **breasts**.

And there were probably even more! More than he could remember! And the only two readers who mattered now were women! It seemed to Chip that Julia was leaving him because "The Academy Purple" had too many breast references and a draggy opening, and that if he could correct these few obvious problems, both on Julia's copy of the script and, more important, on the copy he'd specially laser-printed on twenty-four-pound ivory bond paper for Eden Procuro, there might be hope not only for his finances but also for his chances of ever again unfettering and fondling Julia's own guileless, milk-white breasts. Which by this point in the day, as by late morning of almost every day in recent months, was one of the last activities on earth in which he could still reasonably expect to take solace for his failures.

Exiting the stairwell into the lobby, he found the elevator waiting to torment its next rider. Through the open street door he saw a taxi extinguish its roof light and pull away. Zoroaster was mopping up inblown water from the lobby's checkerboard marble. "Goodbye, Mister Chip!" he quipped, by no means for the first time, as Chip ran outside.

Through the bead curtain of water coming off the marquee, he saw Julia's cab brake for a yellow light. Directly across the street, another cab had stopped to discharge a passenger, and it occurred to Chip that he could take this other cab and ask the driver to follow Julia. The idea was tempting; but there were difficulties.

One difficulty was that by chasing Julia he would arguably be committing the worst of the offenses for which the general counsel of C—— College, in a shrill, moralistic lawyer's letter, had once upon a time threatened to countersue him or have him prosecuted. The alleged offenses had included fraud, breach of contract, kidnap, Title IX sexual harassment, serving liquor to a student under the legal drinking age, and possession and sale of a controlled substance; but it was the accusation of stalking—of making "obscene" and "threatening" and "abusive" telephone calls and trespassing with intent to violate a young woman's privacy—that had really scared Chip and scared him still.

A more immediate difficulty was that he had four dollars in his wallet, less than ten dollars in his checking account, no credit to speak of on any of his major credit cards, and no prospect of further proofreading work until Monday afternoon. Considering that the last time he'd seen Julia, six days ago, she'd specifically complained that he "always" wanted to stay home and eat pasta and "always" be kissing her and having sex (she'd said that sometimes she almost felt like he used sex as a kind of medication, and that maybe the reason he didn't just go ahead and self-medicate with crack or heroin instead was that sex was free and he was turning into such a cheapskate; she'd said that now that she was taking an actual prescription medication herself she sometimes felt like she was taking it for both of them and that this seemed doubly unfair, because she was the one who paid for the medication and because the medication made her slightly less interested in sex than she used to be; she'd said that if it were up to Chip, like, they probably wouldn't even go to movies anymore but would spend the whole weekend wallowing in bed with the shades down and then reheating pasta), he suspected that the minimum price of further conversation with her would be an overpriced lunch of mesquite-grilled autumn vegetables and a bottle of Sancerre for which he had no conceivable way of paying.

And so he stood and did nothing as the corner traffic light turned green and Julia's cab drove out of sight. Rain was lashing the pavement in white, infected-looking drops. Across the street, a long-legged woman in tight jeans and excellent black boots had climbed out of the other cab.

That this woman was Chip's little sister, Denise—i.e., was the only attractive young woman on the planet whom he was neither permitted nor inclined to feast his eyes on and imagine having sex with—seemed to him just the latest unfairness in a long morning of unfairnesses.

Denise picked her way through the pools and rapids on the pavement and joined Chip beneath the marquee.

"Listen," Chip said with a nervous smile, not looking at her, "I need to ask you a big favor. I need you to hold the fort for me here while I find Eden and get my script back. There's a major, quick set of corrections I have to make."

As if he were a caddie or a servant, Denise handed him her umbrella and brushed water and grit from the ankles of her jeans. Denise was the one who'd instructed him to invite his parents to stop and have lunch in New York today. She'd sounded like the World Bank dictating terms to a Latin debtor state, because unfortunately Chip owed her some money. He owed her whatever ten thousand and fifty-five hundred and four thousand and a thousand dollars added up to.

"See," he explained, "Eden wants to read the script this afternoon sometime, and financially, obviously, it's critical that we—"

"You can't leave now," Denise said.

"It'll take me an hour," Chip said. "An hour and a half at most."

"Is Julia here?"

"No, she left. She said hello and left."

"You broke up?"

"I don't know. She's gotten herself medicated and I don't even trust—"

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Are you wanting to go to Eden's, or chasing Julia?"

Chip touched the rivet in his left ear. "Ninety per cent going to Eden's."

"Oh, Chip."

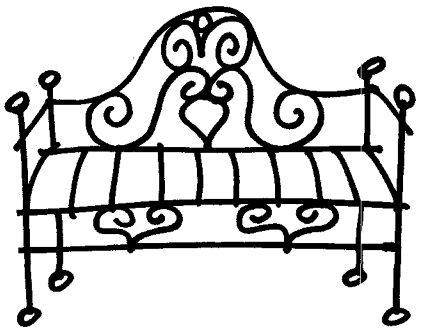
"No, but listen," he said, "she's using the word 'health' like it has some kind of absolute timeless meaning."

"This is Julia?"

"She takes pills for three months, the pills make her unbelievably obtuse, and the obtuseness then defines itself as mental health! It's like blindness defining itself as vision. 'Now that I'm blind, I can see there's nothing to see.' "

Denise sighed and let her shoulders droop. "What are you saying? You want to follow her and take away her medicine?"

"I'm saying the structure of the entire culture is flawed," Chip said. "I'm saying the bureaucracy has arrogated the right to define certain states of mind as 'diseased.' A lack of desire to spend money becomes a symptom of disease which requires expensive medication. Which medication then destroys the libido, in other words destroys the appetite for the one pleasure in life that's free, which means the person has to spend even *more* money on compensatory pleasures. The very definition of mental 'health' is the ability to participate in the consumer economy. When you buy into therapy, you're buying into buying. And I'm saying that I personally am losing the battle with a commercialized, medicalized, totalitarian modernity right this instant."



Denise closed one eye and opened the other very wide. "If I grant that these are interesting issues," she said, "will you stop talking about them and come upstairs with me?"

Chip shook his head. "There's a poached salmon in the fridge. A crème fraiche with sorrel."

"Has it occurred to you that Dad is sick?"

"An hour is all it's going to take. Hour and a half at most."

"I said has it occurred to you that Dad is sick?"

Chip had a vision of his father trembling and pleading in the doorway, and to block it out he tried to summon up an image of sex with Julia, with the azure-haired stranger, with Ruthie, with anyone, but all he could picture was a vengeful, Fury-like horde of disembodied breasts.

"The faster I find Eden and make those corrections," he said, "the sooner I'll be back. If you really want to help me."

An available cab was coming down the street. He made the mistake of looking at it, and Denise misunderstood him.

"I can't give you any more money," she said.

He recoiled as if she'd spat on him. "Jesus, Denise—"

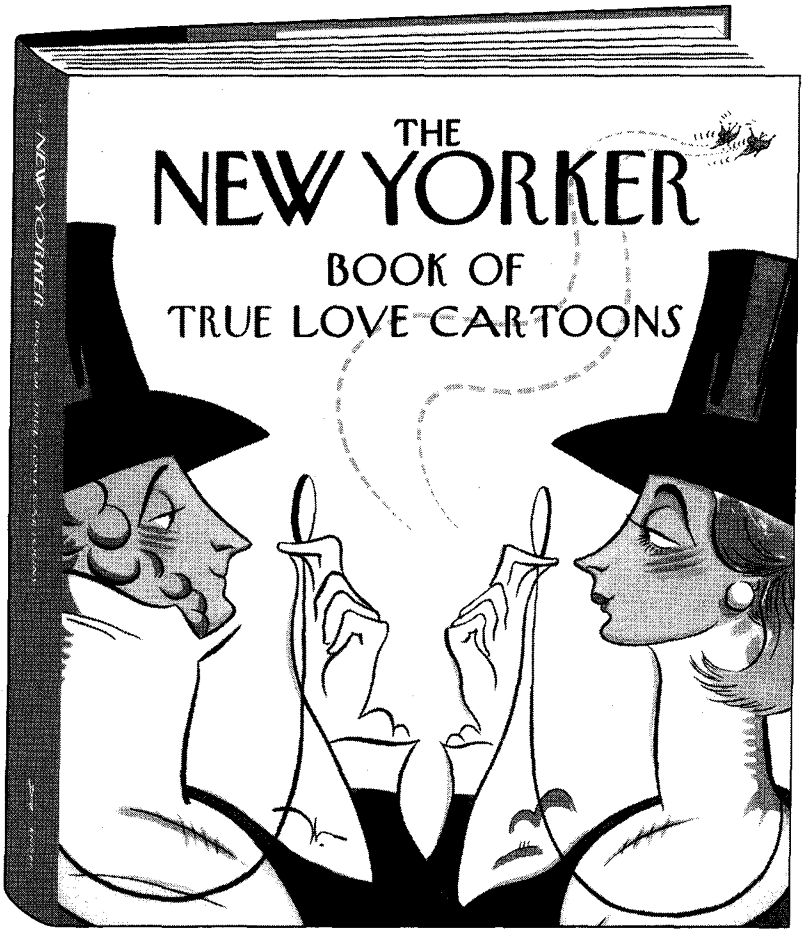
"I'd like to but I can't."

"I wasn't asking you for money!"

"Because where does it end?"

He turned on his heel and walked into the downpour and marched toward University Place, smiling with rage. He was ankle deep in a boiling gray sidewalk-shaped lake. He was clutching Denise's umbrella in his fist without opening it, and still it seemed unfair to him, it seemed *not his fault*, that he was getting drenched. ♦

What's funny about true love?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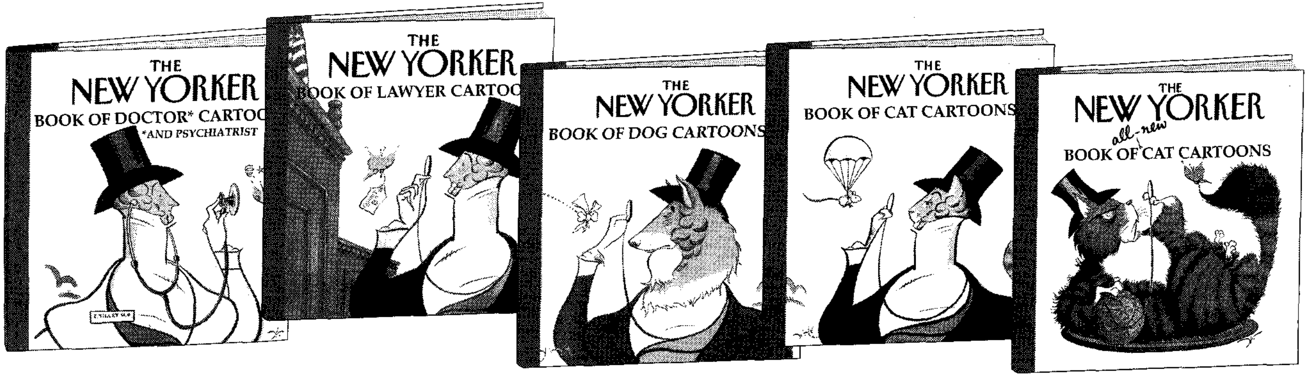
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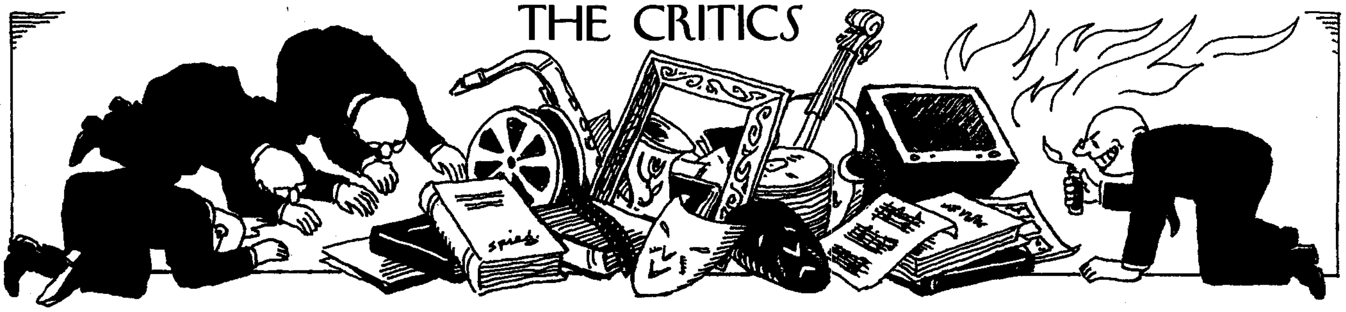


BOOKS

SCANDALIZERS-IN-CHIEF

Five Presidents and how they shrank.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

EXCEPT in Bob Woodward's first book, "All the President's Men," which he co-wrote with Carl Bernstein and which is their account of how they broke the Watergate story, Woodward has conducted his career as an author on the basis of a single technique: persuading people high up in government to give him firsthand accounts of their closed-door doings. Washington journalism has had scoop kings before—James Reston in his heyday, Drew Pearson in his—but Woodward, in his quarter-century reign, has invented a variation of the game in which, rather than just report the juicy facts and attribute them to sources, he presents his reportorial harvest in the form of scenes. In an omniscient voice, he offers an account of the meeting at which the deal went down as if he had been there, though he hadn't.

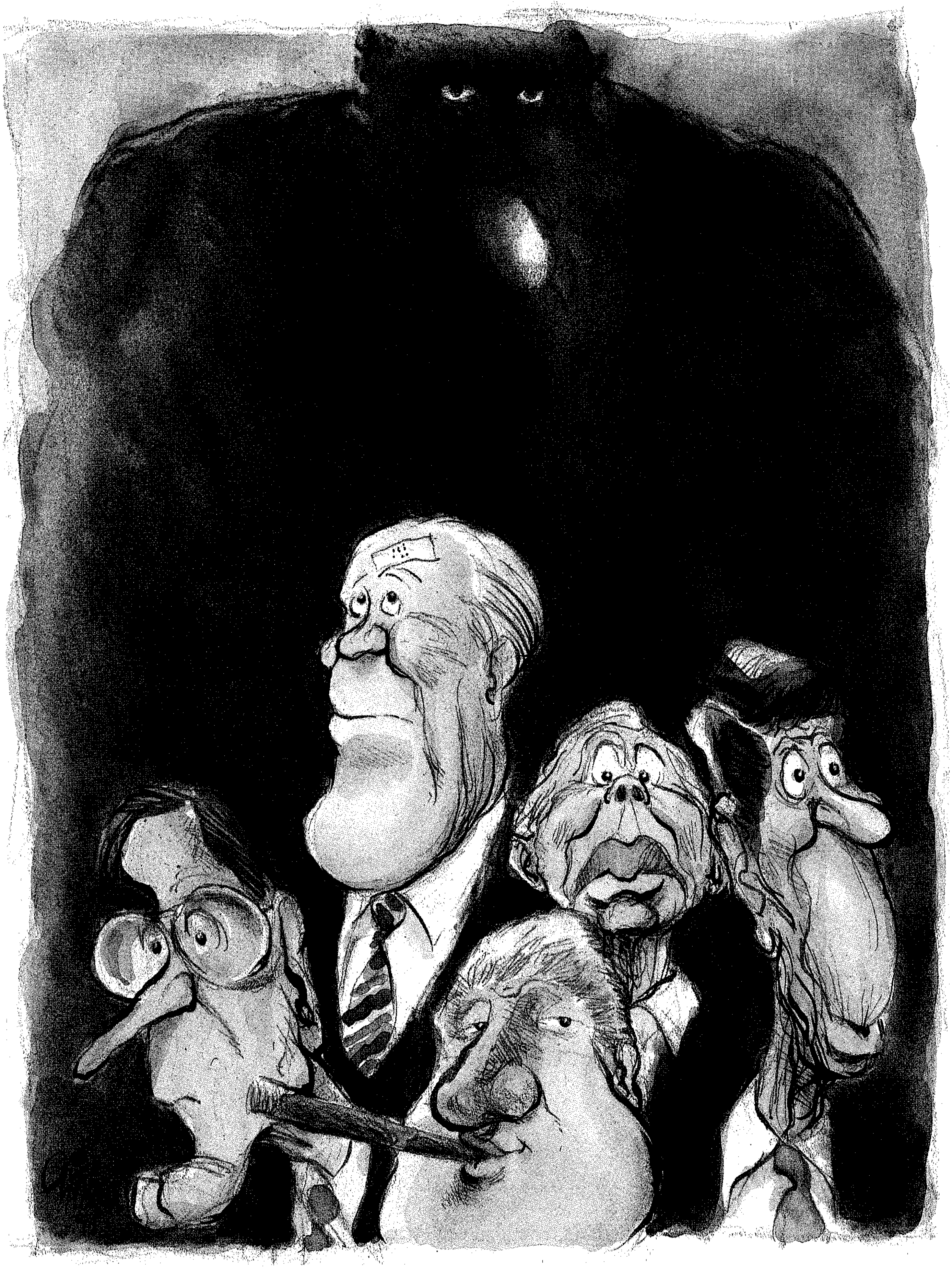
The heart of Woodward's achievement is the interview, not the presentation of it on the page. He can get in to see the person who's stiffing the rest of the press, and then extract a dramatic step-by-step report of what really happened. Twenty years ago this fall, I went to work at the Washington *Post,* and Woodward, then the metropolitan-news editor of the paper and a man more generously inclined toward young reporters than famous journalists usually are, took me out to dinner at a low-rent Chinese restaurant and instructed me in his methods. He told me to meet people in relaxed settings, away from the office, and get them talking; to listen and take time; and then go see them again and again and again. Just as instructive as his advice was the physical sensation of being in his presence. With a half smile on his wide crocodile's mouth, a gleam of honest fascination in his eyes, and a flat, guileless Midwestern honk in his voice, he radiated understanding and intimacy and trust. He seemed to get completely what I had to say and to find it riveting, while at the same time he communicated that betrayal was something he just wasn't capable of.

Of course, more than charm and skill are involved in the transaction between Woodward and his sources. They get the additional reward of having their point of view adopted and presented in print as the inarguable truth. (The scenes sometimes have a Ping-Pong-like quality, because Woodward's empathy switches back and forth from one character to another, depending on whose account he's drawing upon.) Almost always, Woodward's sources are presented as heroes, and if there are villains in any of his books they're people who obviously didn't talk to him. Why would you turn him down? Washington is the opposite of Hollywood in the credit department—almost nobody but the President, not even Cabinet secretaries, gets any. As a character in a Woodward book, you can show the world that you delivered the warning that, if heeded, would have prevented the disaster ("Stephanopoulos was aghast"; "Shultz did not want to see another American president destroyed"; "Hartmann virtually got on his knees and begged"), or offered the advice that saved the day:

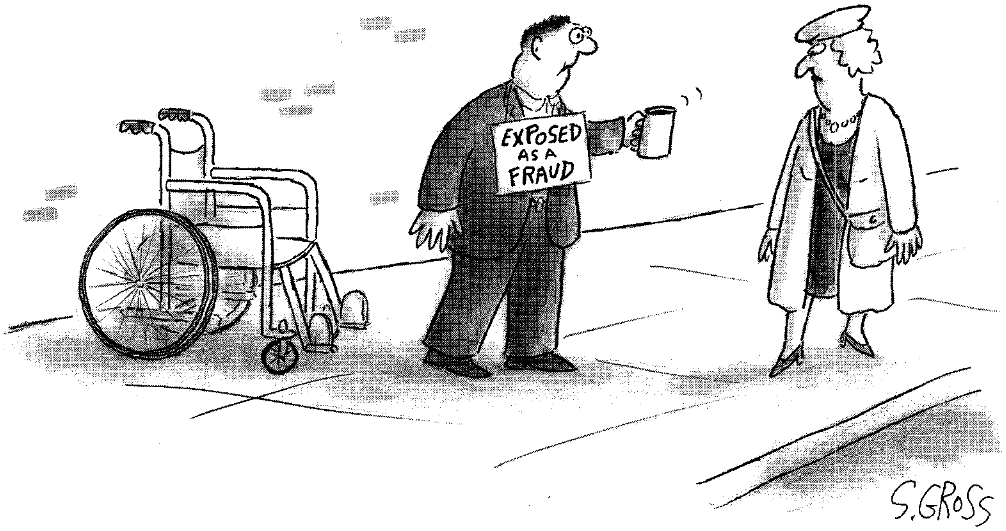
> On many days Fitzwater went to see the president in private to brief him on the latest Sununu story or reaction.
>
> In late November 1991, Bush brought in Fitzwater for an evaluation. "Can Sununu get through this?" he asked. "I'm getting calls from friends saying he's hurting the presidency."
>
> "Mr. President," Fitzwater answered, knowing this moment was his chance, "you've got to decide whether you need him and whether he's the best person to do certain things for you, but I can tell you in a press sense, a public sense, that it's hurting really badly. Now what it's done, it's emboldened all your enemies to be your enemies because they were afraid of him, now they're not anymore.". . .
>
> Expecting a tough reelection campaign, Bush could not afford to have any staff member become a campaign issue. He moved on Sununu, forcing his resignation.

IN the long course of "Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate" (Simon & Schuster; $27.50), which covers the period from 1974 to the present (all the quotations so far have come from it), it becomes clear that while incumbent Presidents, who usually won't talk to Woodward, come and go, their top advisers, who usually do talk, keep reappearing. If you're a Presidential aide, the cost-benefit calculation is simple: If I cooperate with Woodward, the President may cool on me for being disloyal, but he won't be around much longer, and everybody else who figures in my future, from book publishers to the next President, will have seen me portrayed as a wise, important figure. It's no contest.

So reportorially the Woodward technique works fabulously well. (And, it must be said, however good the structural reasons for its success, it doesn't work for anybody but Wood-



The post-Watergate Presidency: an ever-increasing engagement in prosecution management.



ward.) Moreover, when a Woodward book is published, it makes news: there is always a series of excerpts in the *Post,* around which springs up a distinct, though short-lived, subculture of stories in the press, arguments on television shows, and indignant denials by sources who have been excessively candid. All of this tends to obscure what the experience of actually reading the book from start to finish is like. In literary terms, Woodward relies heavily on the hope that the new information he has got will convey a powerful—almost a physical—wallop of discovery and moment.

The importance of the scenes is assumed, not portrayed dramatically or earned through persuasion. Woodward handles feelings simply by noting their presence: "Showing emotion, the first lady said to McCurry that there was no way to understand what she was going through." The setting—usually the White House—and the impressive job titles of the players, along with the thrill of knowing that secrets are being revealed for the first time, do a lot of Woodward's authorial work for him. He keeps the camera in a steady, even closeup and records details with a Beckettian flatness of tone:

> On May 14, Lytton went to meet with Bush. After a delay because Queen Elizabeth II was visiting the White House, Gray and Lytton were ushered into the Oval Office complex at 2 p.m. The White House chief of staff, John Sununu, showed up also.
>
> What are you doing here? Gray inquired of Sununu.
>
> Sununu said he was going to attend the meeting.
>
> Gray said only lawyers could be present. Sununu asked Lytton to explain.
>
> A non-lawyer at the meeting, Lytton said, would destroy the lawyer-client privilege of confidentiality.
>
> Okay, Sununu said, and he left.
>
> Gray and Lytton went into the small study by the Oval Office where Bush was waiting. The president was fiddling on his computer, which he was learning to use.

Obviously, this works only if the subject matter has been pre-sold and pre-formed: we have to be getting a replay of a story that we're already familiar with and interested in. In "Shadow" Woodward has made his job especially challenging, because his subject is a theme rather than, as usual, an event: the long-term effect of Watergate on the Presidency. His aim is to pull together twenty-five years' worth of material, for much of which the jolt of immediacy is long gone, and demonstrate that what unifies it is an ever-increasing engagement in prosecution management by Presidents and their aides. ("Shadow" is a book with many characters who are criminal-defense lawyers.) He begins with a long set piece reconstructing Gerald Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon, and ends with a painstakingly specific account of the Clinton scandals: Travelgate, Filegate, the Lewinsky affair, and—finally—the impeachment and trial.

WOODWARD is undoubtedly right that this component of the Presidency has expanded alarmingly. Although his account is structured in such a way as to overemphasize the point—it's a history of the modern Presidency in which everything but scandal is absent—it is true that Watergate changed the job. There could be no more dramatic demonstration than our having just impeached a President for attempting to hide an affair with one woman from the proceedings in a sexual-harassment lawsuit filed by another woman. The new dynamic of the Presidency is one we need to understand and do something about. Woodward has put it before us, speedily and with a forceful thud.

What you notice first, though, is not Woodward's rather thin explanation of the scandalization of the Presidency but that "Shadow" is full of great stuff. Woodward is still a reporting god, and "Shadow" contains a vast attic miscellany of vivid details, might-have-beens, and events hitherto unknown. Representative Henry Hyde, Woodward tells us, attempted by an elaborate back-channel maneuver to have the House of Representatives censure Clinton instead of impeaching him, though Hyde was the leading public advocate of impeachment. (For only the second time, Woodward has provided source notes, but they're usually not much help. This one is attributed to "author's interviews with four knowledgeable sources"; he doesn't say whether he interviewed Hyde.) When James Schlesinger was Ford's Secretary of Defense, he violated a direct order from the President in not carrying out four air strikes against Cambodia. In Kenneth Starr's impeachment referral to the House, Samuel Dash, the chief counsel to the Senate Watergate committee turned "ethics advisor" to Starr, inserted the word "unlawfully" in the assertion of one of Clinton's alleged misdeeds, even though it wasn't illegal.

In one of the few scenes where Woodward's deadpan method of presentation works to perfect comic effect, Robert Bennett, coaching Clinton before his all-important deposition in the Paula Jones case (the deposition in which he denied under oath having sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky), devotes all his energy to getting his client ready to answer questions about another woman with whom his name had been linked, a certain Marilyn Jo Jenkins, because he can't believe that Clinton would have been dumb enough to get involved with an intern. In general, both Clintons pay the usual price for not talking to Woodward. Bill Clinton comes across as a man who cares only about sex and golf, and Hillary as paranoid and disastrously inflexible. Starr (who is reported to have thought or felt things, though he isn't a named source) visits the White House to take depositions from the Clintons. The President, after his turn, tries to charm Starr by amiably suggesting that he be shown the Lincoln Bedroom. Enter the First Lady, who whispers, "Don't you dare show him the Lincoln Bedroom." While she is being questioned by Starr, a White House steward rushes in, opens a closet, and fetches the Presidential golf clubs.

Mixed in with these tidbits is a lot that we're all familiar with, such as a detailed account of Clinton's videotaped deposition before Starr's prosecutors last August. It's as if Woodward couldn't bear to leave out anything; if he had pruned some of the material, his original work would have shown to better advantage. The price that Woodward pays for being overinclusive isn't just a narrative shapeliness but the precision of the argument. Roughly the first half of the book is devoted to the Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush Administrations. Woodward's mission is to demonstrate that Watergate reverb was the dominant factor in each of those Presidencies. There is almost always a problem of synching as he's trying to do this. The authorial voice is so exclusively set up to deliver scenes straightforwardly that tying them together or explaining them is difficult.

In the case of the Clinton Administration, the question isn't whether scandals have dominated but why they have. When Clinton took office, Lawrence Walsh was still at work as the Iran-Contra independent counsel—a run that spanned three Presidencies. Joseph diGenova had just been appointed independent counsel on Passportgate, the scandal that involved the Bush Administration's having rummaged around in Clinton's passport records during the campaign, and that investigation lasted

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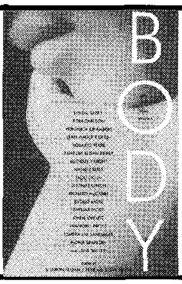
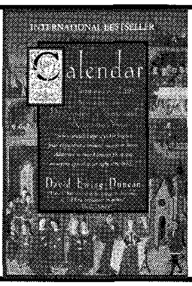
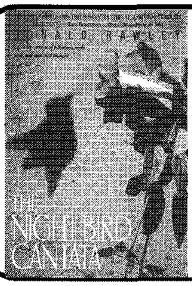


Body
Edited by Sharon Sloan Fiffer and Steve Fiffer
In the sexiest and most exquisitely written anthology of the season, 18 literary stars contemplate the body part that intrigues them most. Jane Smiley writes about the belly; Leah Hager Cohen muses on the breasts; and Rosario Ferré contributes an unforgettable piece entitled "The Blessings of the Butt."

Calendar
David Ewing Duncan
"Gripping, expansive and scholarly...Duncan has achieved a rare feat in turning something ordinary into an extraordinary metaphor of life." —*The Observer*
This fascinating international bestseller explores the influential forces that have, throughout the ages, contributed to the way we keep time today.





The Night Bird Cantata
Donald Rawley
"Rawley's writing blazes unapologetically....It is a literary movement in itself." —Sandra Tsing Loh
Summer is a season both magical and cruel in this startling and powerful debut novel of a troubled boy who learns the skills necessary to survive a lifetime of betrayal.

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BRIEFLY NOTED

Man of the Hour, by Peter Blauner (Little, Brown; $24). At a Coney Island high school, a teacher named David Fitzgerald saves his class from a bomb deposited on a bus and becomes a national hero and then a despised suspect in the case. This soberly written psychological thriller successfully brings together three social and moral worlds: Fitzgerald's agonized liberalism; the opportunism of the media; and the tragicomic anguish of violent Islamic fundamentalists in America, who are caught between disgusted rejection of the country's hedonism and sneaking enjoyment of the very thing that they revile.

The Elusive Embrace, by Daniel Mendelsohn (Knopf; $24). Mendelsohn's sophisticated inquiry into homosexuality, identity, and language is so lovingly integrated into this memoir that intellectual explorations seem to be as much a part of his life as his family and his lovers are. Few writers could smuggle Henri Bergson into a Y.M.C.A. weight room without seeming pretentious, but Mendelsohn manages; his etymological investigations and his readings of Catullus and Sappho are curiously tender, and make the memories—of a college love for a beautiful swim-team boy, for instance, or of a trickster grandfather—even more affecting.

Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804-1834, by Richard Holmes (Pantheon; $32). Opium addict, lecturer, plagiarist, journalist, man-about-town, leech, genius: Coleridge was all of them. In the superb concluding volume of a two-volume biography, Holmes recounts the poet's troubled later years—the breach with Wordsworth and Grasmere, his unrequited passion for Asra, his triumphs and failures as a writer, friend, and father—and in doing so has given us a life of extraordinary depth and dimension.

The Lives of Animals, by J. M. Coetzee (Princeton; $19.95). This hybrid collection of fiction and essays is a provocative version of Socratic philosophy. It begins with a story about a Doris Lessing-like author who visits her conflicted son and his antagonistic wife while lecturing at the university where they teach. The mother's hobbyhorse, that Animals R Us, embarrasses the academic couple, and her suggestion that they are like Nazis because they eat meat infuriates them. Other distinguished academics carry on this dialogue in playful fiction and sober commentary, in which the most eloquent part may be the descriptions of communication with animals.

A Kiss in Space, by Mary Jo Salter (Knopf; $22). Salter's formally polished poems invite the reader into a world of charged discrepancies, where we feel strangely "giddy, as one is when all is lost." Her gaze works best when it is recalibrating a familiar perspective with a touch of mild eccentricity—whether it's Chartres from a hot-air balloon, a family's odd home videos, or an embrace at the space station Mir.

for three years. Then, just after Clinton's one-year anniversary in office, the first independent counsel looking into Clinton, Robert Fiske, took up his post. From then on, as Woodward tells the tale, Clinton's Presidency has been a succession of propitiatory offerings of officials to the scandal gods, investigations, internal investigations meant to forestall further external investigations, and external investigations into internal efforts to outwit previous external investigations. (In the end, as Woodward says, it's always about the coverup.) Defense lawyers have relentlessly expanded their jurisdiction over what Clinton says in public and how he spends his time. The basic weekly rhythm of Washington has been set to an amazing extent by legal proceedings, press inquiries, and congressional hearings on official misconduct, and the flinging back and forth of charges on the television talk shows. And this was the case, as Woodward reminds us, well before 1998, the year of Monica Lewinsky.

A generation ago, many of the leading American historians were students of the twentieth-century Presidency: William E. Leuchtenburg, Frank Freidel, John Morton Blum, Arthur S. Link, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., among others. Today, nothing could be more out of fashion among academic historians than the Presidency, which seems impossibly stodgy as a field of intellectual endeavor. Therefore, we have household-name Presidential historians who were trained in other fields. Woodward, who is putting himself into the group with this book, and Robert Caro are former newspaper reporters; Doris Kearns Goodwin is a political scientist; Michael Beschloss and Edmund Morris are self-employed authors. Because the field of Presidential studies isn't dominated by a tightly organized professional cadre, it is more lively and accessible—more pop—than it used to be, but less orderly. "Shadow," a Presidential history organized more for revelatory value than to present an argument, is a case in point. Interest, ideology, rhetoric, political strategy, government policy, the changing mood and demography of the United States, the play of events in the world—all this is absent from Woodward's book. And, even within the narrow confines of this approach, Woodward hasn't got his evidence to point in the direction he seems to want it to.

Hiding inside Woodward's big book is a devastating little book about the independent-counsel law. All four Watergate special prosecutors opposed it when it first came before Congress, in 1975. Ken Starr has lobbied repeatedly not to have it renewed. (The law expires every five years.) Clinton's first White House counsel, Bernard Nussbaum, urged him not to renew it. Clinton overruled him, but, according to Woodward, had a last-minute pang when it landed on his desk to be signed, and asked his chief of staff, Leon Panetta, "Do I have to?" The problems with the law are both general and particular. The politics of the moment is usually such that the President and the Attorney General don't feel they can afford not to ask for an independent counsel, so the appointment, almost inevitably, is made. Justice Antonin Scalia wrote, in a dissent to a Supreme Court decision in 1988 that upheld the law (the dissent is quoted by Woodward):

> How frightening it must be to have your own independent counsel and staff appointed, with nothing else to do but to investigate you until investigation is no longer worthwhile—with whether it is worthwhile not depending upon what such judgments usually hinge on, competing responsibilities.

Most of the independent-counsel investigations that Woodward describes in "Shadow" seem to have been a ridiculous waste of time and money, beginning with the very first one, by Arthur Christy, in 1979 and 1980, into whether Hamilton Jordan had taken cocaine at Studio 54. (After six months of investigation, Christy declined to bring any charges.) Just as in Mafia movies the idea that one more murder will settle everything always turns out to be delusional, so, too, under the independent-counsel law it seems there can never be that one last investigation, culminating in one last indictment or resignation, after which Washington will be clean and at peace. Instead, the structure of the law seems inevitably to set off a psychodrama of self-pity, grandiosity, and revenge fantasy on both sides. Starr, in Woodward's account, comes across as a reasonable man who was driven mad (or, as Woodward more responsibly puts it, "lost his way") because of the nature of the job and of the Clintons, and who came to see the feints and ploys of his opponents as shocking personal attacks on him to which the normal response was total war. Once he had arrived at this emotional state, he was able to convince himself that adding Monica Lewinsky to his investigation would be "a chance to break into the ring of silence that had surrounded Clinton for years": it was as if all the distinctions among types of misdeeds by his blood-enemy had been erased in his mind.

After taking us through hundreds of pages of close thrust and parry between White House staffs and investigators, Woodward ends with a four-page epilogue on the lesson of it all, and that, he says, amazingly, is that the White House scandals have been the fault of the various Presidents:

> Why did they not see that they would be held fully accountable for their exercise of power?
>
> Historians and psychiatrists will have their own answers to that question, but I have one preliminary conclusion. They have become victims of the myth of the big-time president. As successors to George Washington and Franklin Roosevelt, they expect to rule. But after Vietnam and Watergate, the modern presidency has been limited and diminished. Its inner workings and the behavior of the presidents are fully exposed.
>
> The men who followed Nixon are like addicts who have been denied their supply of drugs, in this case the alluring narcotic of presidential power.

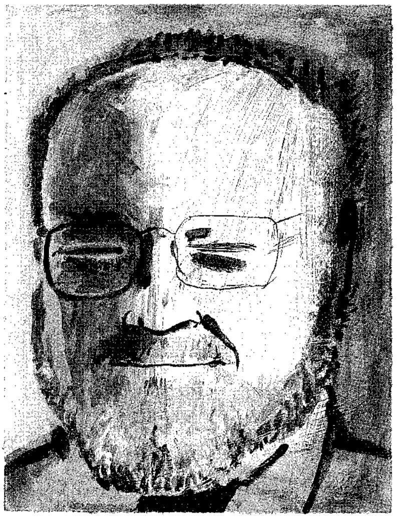
It is jarring to think that Woodward reads his own copious and persuasive evidence in this way. Of the five Presidents in "Shadow," only one, Clinton, might seem to have slipperiness at the top of his list of personal qualities, yet all five, Woodward winds up implying, were overwhelmed by ethical problems of their own making. What conceivable President could have the Christlike transparency and humility to avoid the troubles that Woodward shows entangling these five? In any case, although the Presidency may have been diminished in terms of honor and respect, it certainly hasn't been limited in power since the days of Washington, or even Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The rise of the media and of the suburbs, and the concomitant decline of the political parties, has diminished Congress far more than the Presidency.

For years, a debate has been going on about scandals in Washington, with blame being directed, from various quarters, at the press, the courts, prosecutors, and Congress. Woodward, who probably deserves the title of father of the Washington scandal culture, has now proclaimed, in effect, that the whole debate has been pointless, because the real problem is simply official hubris. Can that really be what he thinks? Or has he just put so much of his energy into what he's great at—gathering evidence—that there wasn't enough left over to make sense of it? ♦

ACQUIRED TASTES

A killer's consuming passions.

BY TAD FRIEND



Thomas Harris

MARTHA STEWART has always terrified me, and at last I know why. This small epiphany occurred as I was reading Thomas Harris's new novel, "Hannibal" (Delacorte; $27.95). Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the noted polymath and sociopath, is tutoring a rather bemused dinner guest in haute cuisine:

> Dr. Lecter took off Krendler's runner's headband as you would remove the rubber band from a tin of caviar.
>
> "All we ask is that you keep an open mind." Carefully, using both hands, Dr. Lecter lifted off the top of Krendler's head, put it on the salver, and removed it to the sideboard.... With an instrument resembling a tonsil spoon, Dr. Lecter removed a slice of Krendler's prefrontal lobe, then another, until he had four. Krendler's eyes looked up as though he were following what was going on....
>
> With splendid dexterity, the doctor brought the firmed slices to a plate, dredged them lightly in seasoned flour, and then in fresh brioche crumbs.
>
> He grated a fresh black truffle into his sauce and finished it with a squeeze of lemon juice.
>
> Quickly he sautéed the slices until they were just brown on each side.
>
> "Smells great!" Krendler said.

Remind you of anyone? My point is not that Martha Stewart fries up human flesh (she probably doesn't) but that it's always an error to focus on technique alone. Lecter's guest, aspiring to learn how to prepare fresh brains, fails to notice whose brains are being prepared.

There is a clear connection between gold-leafing a turkey (Martha) and ripping someone's lungs out and arraying them to resemble the bloody wings of a Norse ritual (Hannibal). As a public act, each operation flaunts technique as its own teleology. Such displays of refinement are ostensibly what separate one class from another; yet our very desire to mimic the tastemakers is what places them out of reach—Hannibal, like Martha, derives his power from a consciousness of his own superiority. The difference is that when we fail to meet Martha's standards we're eaten up with envy; when we fail to meet Hannibal's we're eaten up with truffle sauce.

Like Martha, Hannibal particularly prizes his skills in the kitchen. The pleasure of a meal derives from the choiceness and rarity of its ingredients; rarest of all is a meal composed of human suffering. The horror in Thomas Harris's novels invariably stems from a blurring of the usual food boundaries: all the dark impulses—rage, lust, loneliness, shame—are made oral; everything desired and feared is swallowed whole. We are each other's ortolans.

Thus, in "Red Dragon" (1981), still Harris's best novel, there is a scene where a blind woman asks to touch Francis Dolarhyde's face to learn if he is smiling. Dolarhyde, who moonlights as a serial killer known as the Tooth Fairy, is equally curious. "How well would she get around with her fingers bitten off? Dolarhyde mused. Even in street teeth he could do it as easily as biting off breadsticks." The "street teeth"—Dolarhyde wears dentures—is an assured touch, but it's the homey "breadsticks" that appalls.

In "Hannibal," which has loftier cultural ambitions, the Fine Arts 101 killings include a betrayer who is hanged and disembowelled so as to resemble the figure of Judas on the Benevento Cathedral; lovers whose dead bodies are posed to suggest Botticelli's "Primavera"; and the synchronized exertions of a squad of man-eating pigs. (Harris clarifies, laconically, "Any pig will eat a dead man, but to get him to eat a live one some education is required.") As Martha would say, it's a *good* thing.

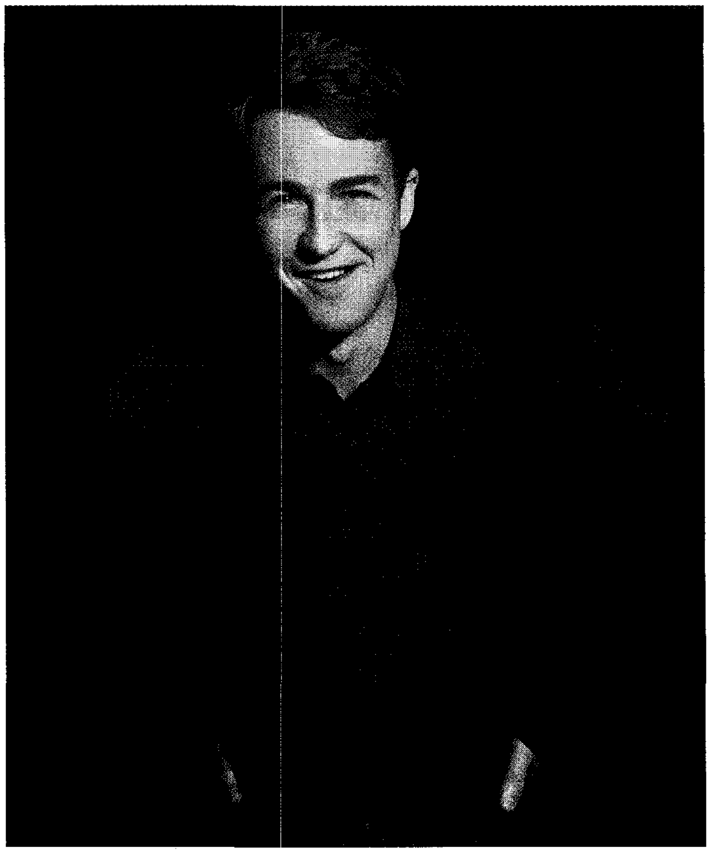
THE real villain in "Hannibal" isn't the eponymous aesthete but Mason Verger, who likes to terrify slum children and then drink Martinis mixed with their tears. Verger was both a patient and an early victim of Dr. Lecter's: the psychiatrist fed him angel dust and encouraged him to scrape off his own face with a mirror shard and feed it to his dogs. This is taking the vogue for fruit-acid peels—let alone the countertransference—too far, but then Verger was a child molester who often masturbated to a picture of Mme. Curie: perhaps he merited a rebuke. Now that Lecter has escaped from federal custody, Verger's obsessive goal is to capture him alive and then partake of his body and blood in a barnyard transubstantiation. (Cue the pigs.)

F.B.I. Special Agent Clarice Starling has to hunt Lecter down before Verger does, and she approaches the task with mixed feelings. In "The Silence of the Lambs" (1988), Starling, then a beautiful young trainee, caught and shot the serial woman-skinner Jame Gumb with Lecter's help. In return, she traded details of her childhood traumas, and he used his psychiatric expertise, none too gently, to help her understand her nightmares.

Starling and Lecter shared a wiry strength and a dislike of the cruder aftershaves—Chaps, Brut, Old Spice. But, while Starling, visiting Lecter in a maximum-security asylum, admired his charcoal drawings of the Palazzo Vecchio, his origami chickens, and his highbrow asides about Titian's "Flaying of Marsyas," he referred stingingly to her Appalachian roots and transparent upward mobility: "You're a well-scrubbed, hustling rube with a little taste. . . . Desperate not to be like your mother." Lecter was particularly offended by Starling's earnestness. Though self-conscious—she dressed up

SHOWCASE BY HERB RITTS

NORTON'S ANTHOLOGY

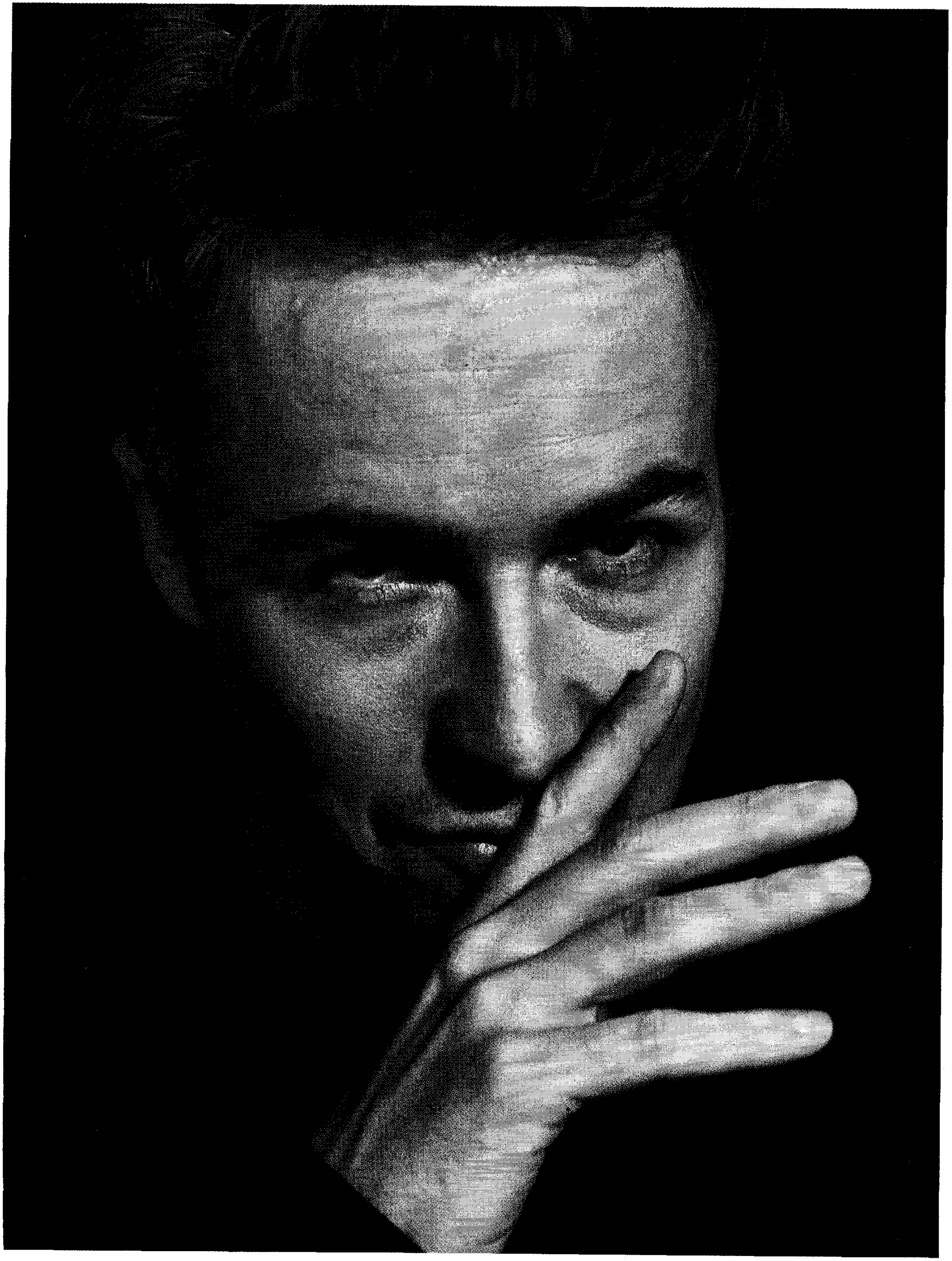


FOR an actor of such unusual talent and emotional range, Edward Norton has a surprisingly unromantic background. He was raised by a teacher mother and lawyer father in the leafy planned community of Columbia, Maryland, graduated from Yale, and never felt "anything but the fullest kind of support," he says. The only deprivation he recalls is the absence of the "rich cultural affiliation that lent a kind of character" to his black, Italian, and Jewish friends. "I felt much less specifically defined," he says. The result: "As a child, I had a real compulsion toward mimicking."

With his uncanny eye and ear for the idiosyncrasies of behavior, Norton has legitimatized his childhood habit. In a breakthrough performance as the psychopathic killer in "Primal Fear" (1996), for which he received an Academy Award nomination, he took on the attributes of a person whose experience was in stark contrast to his, and this year he earned another nomination, for his portrayal—in "American History X"—of a tattooed skinhead. He was cast truest to type in Woody Allen's musical "Everyone Says I Love You," in which he played a well-spoken, buttoned-down preppy.

"You've got to force yourself to have a sort of moral objectivity in your observation," Norton says. He compares a good actor to "a reporter investigating a world and a person, the textures of that person's life, what his motivations, his feelings, his emotional dynamics are." Norton sometimes builds his characters from the outside in. For Worm, the preening poker hustler in "Rounders" (1998), he started with the clothes: "Keith Richards-tight pants, rings, chains, undershirts. Good boots. You know, a pair of shoes can affect your entire physical presence."

These days, Norton has been donning a priest's garb for his role in the comedy "Keeping the Faith," which marks his début as a director, and co-stars Ben Stiller as a rabbi. This fall, he'll be wearing a black eye, in "Fight Club" (with Brad Pitt), in which a secret society of men pursue the off-hours thrill of beating one another up. —JOHN LAHR



Edward Norton photographed in Los Angeles, California, on March 6, 1999.

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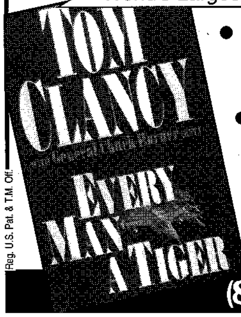

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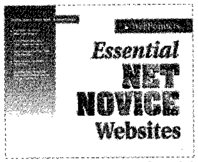

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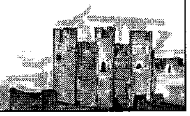

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for their meeting with a "classic casual" handbag—she was unable to recognize the absurdities in their situation. At one point, Lecter asked if she didn't appreciate the wit in his having talked a loudmouth into swallowing his own tongue:

> "No."
> "Officer Starling, that was a lie. The first one you've told me. A *triste* occasion, Truman would say."
> "President Truman?"
> "Never mind."

Lecter's menace was born of the suppression of his desires; our imaginings of the terror he would wreak if he escaped exceeded what that terror could ever be. And that's the trouble with the new book. Once Lecter is out, he goes to Tuscany, which trails only Provence as a middlebrow signifier of the cultured life. Certainly, attentive readers have reason to quail: whenever a popular saga decamps for Italy, the storytelling turns operatic and soggy (witness "The Godfather, Part III," "Asterix Versus Caesar," and the Aeneid). As it turns out, an epicure in a straitjacket is interesting, while an epicure in a black Jaguar is just another Hollywood agent.

Having adopted the campy alias Dr. Fell, Lecter serves as the curator of the Palazzo Capponi in Florence, where he sits in his silk dressing gown playing the "Goldberg Variations" on the clavier as dozens of candles flicker in the dark. Unfortunately, this calls to mind nothing so much as the organ pipings of Vincent Price. And Harris's prose—usually knot-tight—takes on a Price-ish "Welcome to my laboratory" tone:

> If you believe you are beyond harm, will you go inside? Will you enter this palace so prominent in blood and glory, follow your face through the web-spanned dark, toward the exquisite chiming of the clavier? The alarms cannot see us. The wet policeman lurking in the doorway cannot see us.

Well, now, that's because we're readers, having a fictional experience. We're not really *in* the Palazzo Capponi (unless, of course, you are actually reading the book in the Palazzo Capponi, in which case the device works brilliantly).

When Lecter isn't brushing up on his brunch music, what he really enjoys is maxing out his credit cards: "Dr. Lecter very much liked to shop. He drove directly to Hammacher Schlemmer, the purveyor of fine home and sporting accessories and culinary equipment, and there he took his time." Lecter also pops into Tiffany and Christofle, and buys cases of Bâtard-Montrachet wine, Gien French china, Steuben chandeliers, damask napkins, a copper *fait-tout*, two thirty-five-thousand-B.T.U. portable gas burners, green oysters from the Gironde, and bath oils from the Farmacia of Santa Maria Novella. I am not familiar with many of these items, but I bet Robin Leach is.

Starling, who tries to trace Lecter by cross-indexing consumer lists in rare goods, is better versed in such matters as the Weaver stance for gunnery, yet she aspires to the social graces: "For years she had read couture publications on the sly, guiltily, as though they were pornography. Now she began to admit to herself that there was something in those pictures that made her hungry." And Lecter wants to feed those desires, sending her almond soap and a bottle of Château d'Yquem and letters full of psychotherapeutic advice, for insight, too, is an expensive consumer treat. He wants to transform her into his Fair Lady—why can't a woman be more like a six-fingered, maroon-eyed cannibal?

"We all want empathy so badly," Starling broods. "It's hard and ugly to know somebody can understand you without even liking you." In Harris's world, striving for intimacy is akin to making a suicide pact. Will Graham, the F.B.I. investigator in "Red Dragon," tracked the Tooth Fairy using empathy and projection. At a crime scene, he'd start to feel what the killer had felt about his mangled victim: My, she has soft skin and pretty feet, and I'd certainly like to caress her now that she's in repose—hey, wait a minute! When Graham came to understand the Tooth Fairy, the Tooth Fairy responded by ripping Graham's face apart with a knife.

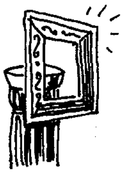
The pleasure of watching Starling and Lecter duel lay in watching their mutual attraction periodically founder upon their mutual distaste. What does it mean that Lecter now wants to be Starling's Martha Stewart—and that she's considering it? Or, as Mason Verger frames the question, listing the possibilities he can imagine, "Does he want to fuck her or kill her, or eat her, or what?" It's a puzzle, all right. But Thomas Harris is clear about the danger posed by the human need to emulate someone or have someone emulate you. Eat drink, man, woman, until we disappear. ◆

THE ART WORLD

FESTIVALISM

Oceans of fun at the Venice Biennale.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



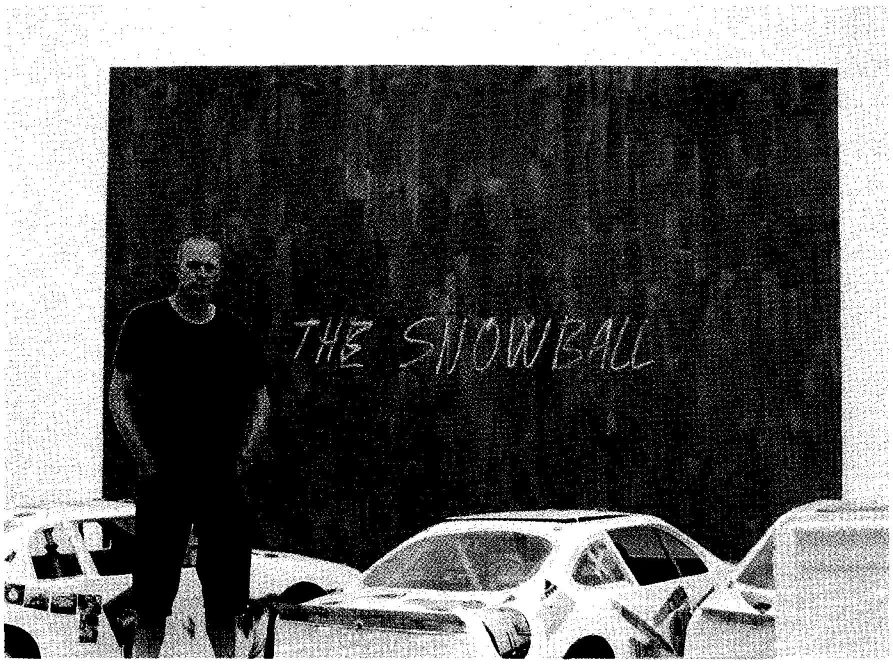
THE best reason for going to Venice to look at contemporary art, of all incongruous things, is that any reason for going to Venice is brilliant. I don't love Venice, exactly. That would be presumptuous. As if Venice cared what anyone feels about it! On a planet remote from the one we know, that incredible place—is it even a city?—maintains an aura of implacable, dreaming self-possession. No number of tourists goofing with pigeons in San Marco can mar its stupendous calm. If anything, they emphasize its aloofness, like jiggly blurs in a time-lapse film. Venice attends only to the progress of light in its scintillant air and across its celadon waters, building all day, every day, to the long-drawn-out climax of an evening that is the first and last evening of the world.

Feeling at once blessed and silly, then, I joined some thirty thousand invitation-bearing art folks for the recent opening of the Venice Biennale. Talk about other planets! The international art world stood out in Venice like a sore asteroid, identifiable by jet-lagged, hectic miens and the furtive avidity of freeloaders in buffet heaven. (An Italian friend told me that tourism-dependent Venetians hate the cheapskate Biennale crowd.) Mild mutual disgust tinged the attitudes of those who, having slipped away individually for half an hour—perhaps to a hushed church with a favorite Giovanni Bellini (mine is a certain altarpiece)—regathered to salute somebody's video installation. The toneless phrase "What have you seen?," apropos the Biennale's vast smorgasbord of visual art, forced itself from every throat like a confession of spiritual desolateness, as if we were sipping sodium pentothal instead of wine. But, hey, we were in Venice. What could be bad?

In fact, the current, forty-eighth Biennale (which is on view until November 7th) isn't bad at all. It is easily the most cogent and illuminating of the several that I've attended—aside, that is, from the chronic malaise of the funny little national pavilions under the colossal trees of the Giardini. What does it mean today, beyond the mystery of what it has ever meant, for an artist to represent a nation? No one knows; and the question positively discomfits most functionaries of the respective public agencies that administer the pavilions. Old-fashioned, feel-good internationalism remains a ruling piety at the Biennale, resisting the brasher tones of global capitalism—if not the odd corporate sponsor—even as local heroes are nudged onto a world stage. Note that almost none of the heroes offer commercially viable art products, such as paintings. (England's Gary Hume is a startling exception; his chic enamelled pictures, on aluminum, seem to be present by mistake.) This Biennale marks a principled stand for a worldwide archipelago of institutions that are crazy in love with installations.

I CALL it Festival Art: environmental stuff that, existing only in exhibition, exalts curators over dealers and a hazily evoked public over dedicated art mavens. The wholesomely witchy Ann Hamilton, known for her accumulations of obsessive make-work objects, has engineered intermittent cascades of bright-fuchsia powder down the inner walls of the American pavilion. The powder picks out bumps of Braille lettering which are said to transcribe readymade poems by the late Charles Reznikoff: these are versified court records of murder, mayhem, and other disasters in the American heartland. You can get dizzy trying to parse Hamilton's political and mystical symbology. Or, like me, you can simply observe that the piece is very pretty and be on your way, feeling obscurely virtuous. In passing, I remark a consistent American policy of choosing, for recent Biennales, artists of an offbeat, marginal-group sort. Chalk it up to the bashful compunctions of a superpower that shrinks from artistic gunboat diplomacy.

Hamilton's effort earned appropriately lukewarm approval from most of the people I talked with. My interlocutors enthused, if at all, over the Belgian pavilion, where the art is hard to see, because, for some reason, the building is filled with dense white fog. Then there



The Danish artist Peter Bonde, with his and Jason Rhoades's installation about car racing.

was the Danish pavilion, where an installation about car racing by the Dane Peter Bonde and the American Jason Rhoades features a deafening motor noise. Also hailed was a great video work by the Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila, in the three-country Nordic pavilion. Ideally suitable as Festival Art, video projections show signs of evolving into a sure-enough art form that splits differences among film, theatre, music, and sculpture. The trick is in turning television's built-in monotony to disarming account. You don't watch video work; you coexist with it for a spell. After giving casual attention to Ahtila's twenty-three-minute, two-screen semi-documentary, a moral fable that suggests hypercondensed Ingmar Bergman, I was stunned to find myself desperately moved. Ahtila is onto something: intensely intimate storytelling that happens to you in public—a life experience that you chance to share with strangers.

Video artists, or artists who use video, dominate a huge group exhibition organized by this Biennale's director, the veteran Swiss impresario Harald Szeemann. (Szeemann might be said to have invented Festivalism, with a fiercely avant-garde exhibition entitled "When Attitudes Become Form," in 1969. Now he presides over the mode's mandarin consolidation.) For a change, the art of less-established artists fills not only the Corderie—the former rope factory in Venice's ancient military shipyard—but other renovated shipyard buildings and the whole of the many-roomed Italian pavilion. Szeemann's tacit proposal of a present-day canon invites generalizations. Thus: What *is* Festival Art? It is anything that commands a particular space in a way that is instantly diverting but not too absorbing. It is anti-contemplative. Viewers must never forget that they are in a crowd. Nor should the crowd pile up for too long at any point. The drill is ambulatory consumption: a little of this, a little of that, thank you, *arrivederci*.

It's enough to hurt the feelings of a connoisseuring art critic. Szeemann's show seemed as little anxious for my opinion as Venice is. The reason, in his case, is an approach geared to quantity rather than quality of response, as was dramatized by the far-travelling thunder of fairly atrocious drumming by viewers on a hundred or so chairs and beds with animal skins stretched over them, by the Chinese artist Chen Zhen. The occasion teems with emergent Chinese artists, by the way. An awful lot of them are prone to the callow preoccupations with sex and naughty sentiments of the newly liberated. (One notices such prurience keenly, owing to the unusual, almost genteel scarcity of explicit sex and hortatory politics in this particular Biennale.) But just about the entire Chinese contingent displays unmistakable flair for the brassy rhetoric and infectious aesthetics of righteous Festivalism. In a few years, if trends hold, Chinese artists are going to be really formidable on the international circuit. Meanwhile, back in Chen's drum room, I grabbed sticks and whaled away, along with everybody else. Why should I be special? And what's wrong with fun?

Installation art, of which the founding father was Marcel Duchamp, used to nurture a quasi-political hostility to "commodity capitalism." That's over. The battle line between non-sellable and sellable art has become a cordial abyss, with crowd-beguiling Festival Art, on one side, and, on the other, humanity's eternal commerce in objects of esteem. (Marketed art works are not commodities, incidentally; economically, they behave more like handmade money.) What's afoot is a global rationalization of the art game, whereby one kind of artist stays in the studio while another becomes familiar with many airports. The peripatetic types may appear to be robust in Venice, but they are, in fact, less secure. Will governments, corporations, and other institutions keep supporting this sort of art? Only if regular people voluntarily come, and happily come again. As with so much else today, the goddess of the box office stands in for blind Justice, weighing the future of art on her indifferent scales. ♦

DANCING

DRY LAKE

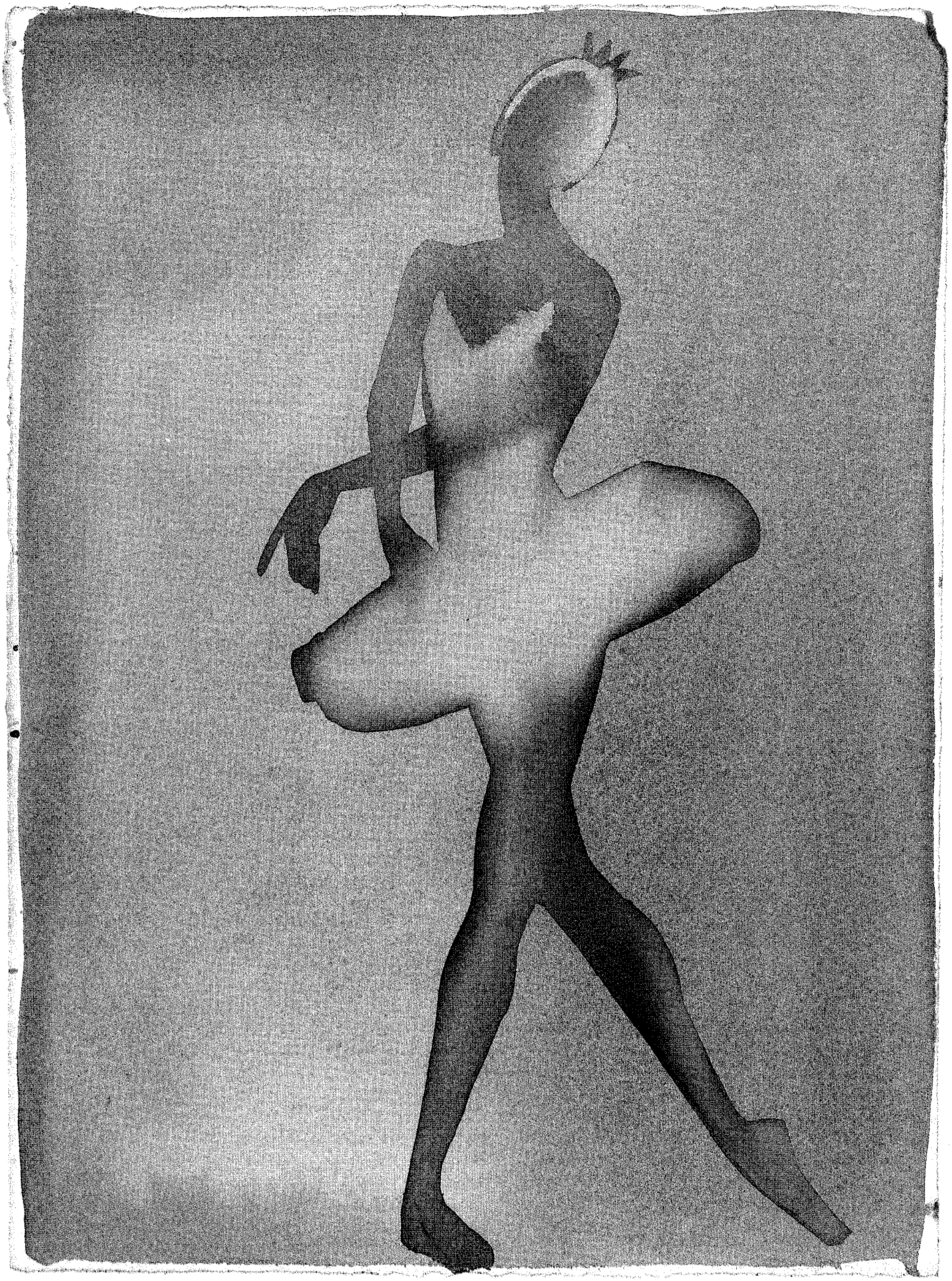
An anti-Romantic "Swan" in a season of classics.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

As Dr. Frankenstein discovered, sticking together a lot of body parts will not produce a human being. The only way to get a human being is to have a baby. Likewise, if you want to mount a new "Swan Lake" you can't just take a swan scene from one production and a mazurka from another and add a little glue. You have to have an idea, *grow* a "Swan Lake." For the "Swan Lake" that Peter Martins created at the Royal Danish Ballet in 1996 and restaged this spring at New York City Ballet, he did extensive research, as he told Robert Sandla of *Stagebill:* "I got every videotape known to man, of every production." You can see the results in his ballet. There's the Black Swan pas de deux from the canonic 1895 Petersburg production; there are sections of Balanchine's 1951 recension of Act II; there's the court jester from the Soviet versions. Martins also added choreography of his own, in his usual overingenious vein. But what he did not supply was any organic principle that would allow us, in Act IV, to remember what had happened in Act II and say, "Ah, yes, I see."

At times, the production is curiously old-fashioned. Who would have thought that Martins, a man who commissions scores from Charles Wuorinen, would have included the four Cygnets, those feathered Rockettes, or the Soviet jester, with his ceaseless gambolling? And yet the production is assertively modern in other ways—above all, in its abstract set designs, by the Danish painter Per Kirkeby. Gone is the palace garden where Prince Siegfried's birthday party is supposed to take place in Act I. The festivities are now held in a sort of brown cube.

Parts of the ballet are thrashingly



N.Y.C.B.'s lead women were all true to themselves in the Odette/Odile role. Here, Monique Meunier—big, free, and fun.

emotional, but elsewhere Martins seems deliberately to have undercut the emotional climaxes—for example, the terrible moment at the end of Act III when Siegfried realizes that he has betrayed Odette, the swan queen, by swearing love to another woman, the phantom Odile. Tchaikovsky’s score has Siegfried tear out of the ballroom, racing, we know, to the lake, to find Odette. Then Act IV opens, and we are at the lake. But Martins has added an interlude between the two acts. The Jester, that little pain in the neck, sneaks into the empty ballroom. He grips his head (“Oy, does the prince have a problem”), but then his eye lights on the throne. According to a running joke in this production, the Jester is always sleepy, and he doesn’t mind napping on uncomfortable Jacobean furniture. That’s what he does now: curls up on the throne and goes to sleep. “Hey, life goes on,” Martins seems to say. After this, it comes as no surprise that at the end of the ballet Martins denies the lovers their traditional death and apotheosis. To the last notes of the score—that beautiful, discord-resolving music—nothing is resolved. Odette bourrées out, a swan still, and Siegfried falls to his knees. Life goes on. In his twenty-two years as a choreographer, Martins has accumulated a long record of anti-Romanticism, without ever coming up with anything to replace the discarded ideal. In this sense, the “Swan Lake” is the capstone of his career.

Needless to say, there wasn’t a wet eye in the house. N.Y.C.B.’s women tried to make something of the ballet. Kyra Nichols, the company’s senior ballerina, was wonderfully pure as Odette and subtly nasty—all pinkness and smiles—as Odile. Monique Meunier was a lot of fun: those feet still aren’t stretched, but you can’t not love her, she’s such a party girl. The big thrill, however, was the company’s rising star, Maria Kowroski, who has just been made a principal. Kowroski is a lady. At the same time, she is a powerhouse, and that’s what’s so impressive about her—the modesty of her demeanor combined with the boldness of her effects. It’s like watching a duchess on a motorcycle—touching. As for the supporting casts, Benjamin Bowman and Adam Hendrickson made the Jester almost bearable. Jenifer Ringer, Jennie Somogyi, and Pascale van Kipnis did heroic service in Martins’ maddeningly complicated Act IV pas de quatre. Arch Higgins gave us something to look at in the Spanish dance. Jock Soto and Robert La Fosse both camped it up as Von Rotbart, but what were they supposed to do? They were trying to get something going.

City Ballet has traditionally been the home of modernism, not of the “classics.” The classics were the job of American Ballet Theatre, the company across the plaza. When Mikhail Baryshnikov took over A.B.T. in the eighties and acquired some modern-looking repertory, he was accused of trying to turn A.B.T. into City Ballet. Is Martins, who also did a “Sleeping Beauty” in 1991, trying to turn City Ballet into A.B.T.?

If so, he has a way to go. One interesting thing about Martins’ “Swan Lake” is what it tells us, by contrast, about A.B.T.—namely, that this company is doing the classics very well. Look at A.B.T.’s “Bayadère”; look, even, at its “Corsaire,” that unashamed swashbuckler, and what you see is artistic imagination at work. A.B.T. now has a pack of young Latin men—Jose Manuel Carreño, Angel Corella, Giuseppe Picone—who have apparently never been told that it might seem old-fashioned to tear around in pirate outfits and rescue captive maidens in jewelled brassieres. These men don’t feel corny, and so they aren’t. Likewise the others. When Ashley Tuttle, as Nikiya, the heroine of “La Bayadère,” refuses the High Brahmin’s importunate love, what we see is not just “Unhand me, you brute” but, in the aching lift of her rib cage, her pride and unwisdom. She will die; we know it now. And when, during Nikiya’s big solo, the excellent Ethan Brown, as the Radjah, turns away and walks, smack on the beat, to the back of the stage, we know that she will die soon. She is beauty, but he is power.

Many of us have always held A.B.T. to a lower standard than City Ballet, and for years that was appropriate. As long as Balanchine was at N.Y.C.B., inventing modernist ballet, it was impossible to compare his company’s achievement with that of the conservative A.B.T. But those days are over. N.Y.C.B.’s repertory, too, has become conservative: old ballets, derivative ballets. Which is not to say that A.B.T. is always making better choices. This season, the company acquired Kenneth MacMillan’s 1971 “Anastasia,” a ballet about Anna Anderson, the woman who claimed she was Tsar Nicholas II’s youngest daughter, miraculously spared from the slaughter at Ekaterinburg. “Anastasia” is a long, silly thing, full of the tabloid nonsense—sex! violence! royalty!—in which MacMillan was so interested. Still, the production was a heartbreaker, for the company treated it every bit as seriously as “Bayadère.” One felt bad, in particular, for Viviana Durante and Alessandra Ferri, who led the first two casts. From the look of their tremulous underpants as they hung upside down, in a hundred-and-eighty-degree split, in the Act III sex-and-anguish duet, they both believed quite strongly that this ballet had tapped into the meaning of life. I hope never to see “Anastasia” again, but watching it was not like seeing the N.Y.C.B. “Swan Lake.” It was bad and alive, not bad and dead.

At the end of the spring season, when the warm weather hit, both companies decided that we had had enough heavy stuff and could use some fun: jazz ballets. N.Y.C.B. staged a whole jazz program—a collaboration with Wynton Marsalis and his Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra—that culminated in a three-part piece, “Duke!,” with sections by Robert La Fosse, Garth Fagan, and Susan Stroman, to Duke Ellington’s music. Fagan’s contribution was a strained business, but the rest was heaven, with La Fosse throwing the dancers into the Lindy Hop and Stroman putting together a little story ballet, “Blossom Got Kissed,” about teaching a bunhead how to boogie. (The joke here is that the girl who can’t dance is Maria Kowroski.) Neither of these pieces has much to do with the past or, I assume, the future of N.Y.C.B. They look like good musical comedy. La Fosse should go to Broadway; Stroman is already there (“Crazy for You,” “Show Boat”). But it was nice to see the dancers happy and relaxed after their hard labor in “Swan Lake.”

A.B.T. presumably didn’t have the money for a new get-down ballet, so it revived an old one, Twyla Tharp’s 1976 “Push Comes to Shove.” The last time I saw “Push,” in 1991, it looked dated. This time, it looked brand-new, because it was new to Ethan Stiefel. Stiefel, who is American, and the son of a Texas state trooper, *has* been told that it is corny to be a pirate. Also, he's not much of an actor. Hence he fits uncomfortably into A.B.T.'s cavalcade of classics. But, oh, what a beautiful ballet dancer he is. In "Push" we see everything he can do (and that happy pirates often cannot): the pinpoint placement, the tiny feats of timing, the burst and fizzle of dynamics, the sheer, American wit of jazz dancing. Stiefel is actually a City Ballet dancer, a Balanchine dancer, and that's what he was until, reportedly, he locked horns with Peter Martins. Now he is at A.B.T., and the company must find vehicles for him. In "Push," they did, and he repaid them.

One hesitates, in writing about the arts, to speak of sincerity. There's so much that is sincere and bad ("Anastasia"). Also, sincerity is aprofessional. There are a million things we must do without love, and we do them. A good example is Stiefel in "La Bayadère." He knows he doesn't belong there; he knows the turban makes him look like Norma Desmond. He wants to go home. Still, he gives us "Bayadère." Nevertheless, there is nothing like sincerity, and it can't be faked. Even if you can do without it in the short run, you can't in the long run—which is something that the people in charge of New York City Ballet are going to have to think about. ♦

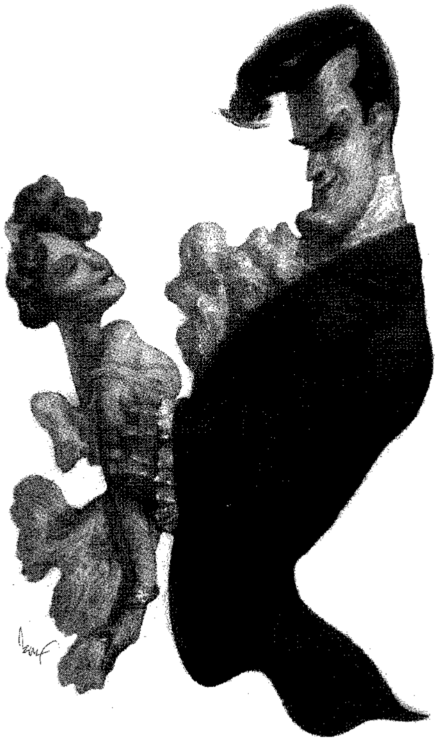
THE CURRENT CINEMA

ALL FOR LOVE

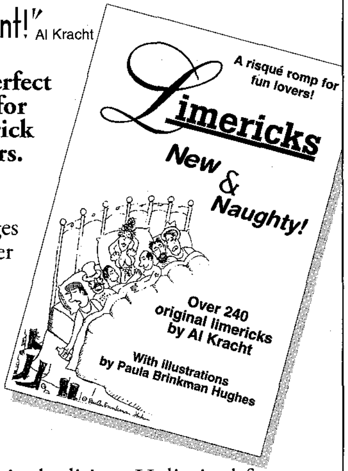
The smug merriment of "An Ideal Husband."

BY ANTHONY LANE

THE spring of 1895 began propitiously for Oscar Wilde. In January had come the première of "An Ideal Husband" and, barely a month later, that of "The Importance of Being Earnest." Not bad, as seasons go. Both plays have been filmed, as you might expect: the former in 1947, by Alexander Korda, and the latter in 1952, by Anthony Asquith, with Michael Redgrave and Edith Evans. The Asquith is usually considered oo stagebound something Wilde might have taken as a compliment), but over time its ugar-almond colors have lent it a rystallized charm, nd I am unwilling o cast aspersions on any film that features the young Joan Greenwood. Now we have a new take on "An Ideal Husband," adapted and directed by Oliver Parker. It tells an extortionate tale: the suspiciously fascinating Mrs. Cheveley (Julianne Moore) arrives in London in 1895 with a plan to ensnare Sir Robert Chiltern (Jeremy Northam). Since he is a man of principle, with the ideal wife (Cate Blanchett) by his side and a sunlit political future stretching before him, a poxy dose of blackmail seems to me precisely what he deserves. Mrs. Cheveley has about her person a compromising letter that could trash Sir Robert's career; in return for her silence, he must speak against his judgment in the



Moore and Everett as schemer and idler in Oscar Wilde's last melodrama.



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House of Commons, by supporting a scheme that will bring shame to England and loot to Mrs. Cheveley.

Sadly, she doesn't get away with it. Why she doesn't I am, on this occasion, unable to say. In the play, Wilde arranges for her to be counterstruck by the revelation that she herself has a dirty past, in which she stole a diamond brooch; that is elided by the film, which opts instead for a frantic fluffing of motivation. The effect is to heighten the already ripe moral cheesiness of the plot; this was Wilde's last entanglement with melodrama (in the theatre, at any rate), and you can feel him fighting to convince himself that any of it matters. The nonsense that Lady Chiltern spouts to her husband about his being noble and pure—"You have been an ideal always"—sits awkwardly with the heretical protestations of idleness that their friend Lord Goring (Rupert Everett) unfurls like silk. His lordship is the sole figure of interest on view, for the simple reason that he is a rehearsal for the one unblemished performance of Wilde's life; namely, "The Importance of Being Earnest." Everything aside from that play, whether it be "An Ideal Husband," "Lady Windermere's Fan," or, indeed, "The Picture of Dorian Gray," is tainted by the allure of sincerity and the drabness of emotional need: Wilde was forever planting a bomb under the sofa of London society, but only once did he actually pluck up the courage to light the fuse.

"An Ideal Husband" is, by comparison, a damp affair, and Parker doesn't help by adding a scene in Parliament, in which Chiltern rises to celebrate "this great nation" and "this most eventful century," and to deprecate "commerce without conscience." I have an awful feeling that we are supposed to take this topically—or, even worse, in earnest. Parker's players bear witness to the general perplexity. Blanchett exudes a gracious authority that would probably work best on a live audience; Minnie Driver, in the role of Chiltern's sister Mabel, gulps and mugs and rolls her eyes like someone who auditioned for a Feydeau farce and has yet to be informed that the bill of fare has been changed. Simon Russell Beale—stout and cunning, with a shifty glitter in his eye—makes a fine newspaper editor but quickly vanishes from view, leaving Everett to rescue the picture. It is always tricky to declaim the overfamiliar, in Wilde and Coward as in Shakespeare, and Everett outwits the problem by not declaiming at all; instead, he chooses to murmur, as though in asides to his own lascivious conscience. "The only possible society is oneself," he says. "To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance." His butler is listening, but Goring is too busy gazing in a mirror, and his sly tones are more endearment than joke. It seems close to insulting, and certainly implausible, that "An Ideal Husband" should close in smug merriment, with everyone bestowing kisses as if they were high fives, while the score weighs in with its tiptoeing strings. Not only does this give off a whiff of amateur dramatics but it smooths over the play's more frowning finale, which left Sir Robert "wrapt in thought" and his wife insisting that "a new life is beginning." Three months after those words were first uttered, Oscar Wilde was in jail. ♦

SWINGERS

Austin and Tarzan return.

BY DAVID DENBY

As Austin Powers, the British spy and satyr, Mike Myers is so available for sex that he marches naked down the steps of a posh hotel, rolling his shoulders and grinning at every woman who passes by. "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me," repeats one of the best jokes from the original Austin Powers movie, of 1997: as Myers parades around the hotel, objects of one sort or another—a child's toy, a long baguette held by a rabbi—interpose themselves between him and the camera just in time to cover his genitals, and, when he turns away, two rounded sides of ham, passing by on a serving cart, cover his rear. Myers may be teasing the conventions of film titillation, but his little game eroticizes the world; every object becomes an extension of his unprepossessing body. Austin Powers is a transcendental jerk, a man so enamored of his own attractions that he escapes alienation even more thoroughly than Tarzan, the other swinging hero of the moment. Ostensibly a parody of the Bond movies, the Austin Powers comedies are closer to a celebration of pure hedonism and the redeeming power of shamelessness; the mock suavity and silly-naughty sexiness of James Bond get turned inside out. The spy is now a grinning Brit twit with the fatuous self-assurance of a tabloid-TV personality.

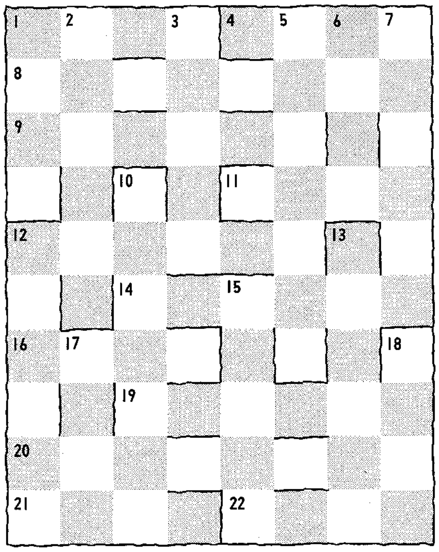
If Sean Connery was what most men, in their fantasies, would like to be, Mike Myers is closer to the way they actually turn out—stumpy but eager. And yet Austin scores. Myers' point, perhaps, is that in the sixties, which is where Austin got his grin (he's been cryogenically frozen and delivered to the nineties), you didn't have to be Sean Connery to get laid. For Myers, the Bond pictures epitomize the free and easy ways of thirty-five years ago; the two Austin Powers movies are filled with fond allusions not only to "Goldfinger" and "The Spy Who Loved Me" but to that giddily artificial sixties product known as "swinging London"—a never-never land concocted out of mod fashion, advertising graphics, excited journalism, and delirious movies. In imagination, it was a time of endless freedom and carnality; the pull of that fantasy is now so strong that in this country the Austin Powers comedies have become a major social phenomenon. The House of Representatives may want to place the Ten Commandments in every classroom, but American teens are worshipping at another tabernacle—the thatch of dark hair pasted onto Myers' chest in homage to Sean Connery's glorious fur. Congressman Bob Barr holding the Decalogue aloft doesn' stand a chance against the power o Shagadelicism.

Which is not to say that "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me is a good movie. Myers' other famou creation, Dr. Evil—the bald, Mao-suited neurotic who wants to dominate th world—is not as weirdly syntactical or a funny as he was the first time. Disguste with his snotty son, Dr. Evil falls in love with a tiny vicious clone of himself, Mini-Me (Verne Troyer), a thirty-two-inch dwarf who bites and generally terrorizes the staff at world-domination headquarters. So let's be clear about this: even as we acknowledge what Mike Myers has added to the world in the way of good cheer, let us also acknowledge that this is a movie in which a midget bites the star in the crotch and then gets picked up, swung around, and bashed into a pole. I'm no defender of formal perfection in movie comedy—some of the Marx Brothers and W. C. Fields movies were pretty messy, too—but the different parts of a messy comedy at least have to be good, and much of this movie is terrible. There's a third Myers character—Fat Bastard, a grotesquely flatulent Scot—who isn't funny at all, and there are depressing scatological jokes, and candy-colored mod sets, and boring, goony sci-fi scenes, and too many exuberantly bad ideas that wear down fast. The two Austin Powers movies could only be called crud classics—we call them classics grudgingly, and with a certain loss of self-respect.

THE new, animated Tarzan, raised by apes, walks with his heavy shoulders leaning forward and his knuckles dragging along the ground. He's the most apelike of Tarzans: animation, which Edgar Rice Burroughs' material seems to have been waiting for all the time, frees the Disney filmmakers o mix animal and human characteris-ics without embarrassment. And it frees hem to use nature as a seethingly active habitat, not as a static background with a uspiciously large number of available lines. Glen Keane, the chief animator of Tarzan," has said that he was inspired by watching his skateboarding son. This Tarzan doesn't swing from trees; instead, he courses rapidly from branch to branch, glen to glen—he treats the tree canopy nd the thick undergrowth below as f they were the swells and hollows of he engorged ocean. The fights between Tarzan and Sabor the leopard seem to ear at our faces. Almost everything set n the jungle is violently exciting; except when the movie falls into the inevitable anality of children's entertainment (the ute elephant and the chirping humans), 's an exhilarating, surf-topping ride. ♦

8 x 10 CRYPTIC

NO. 94 BY TRIP PAYNE



ACROSS

1 Former U.S. Open winner hangs around 1000 members of a fraternal group (4)
4 Absorbed front of residential apartment (4)
8 Finally swim next to a trimmer shark (3-5)
9 Painter of "The Scream" takes in one German city (6)
11 Listen to swell field worker (4)
12 Avenge ruined European city (6)
14 Stage is partly jade green (6)
16 Almost rub out periods (4)
19 Chat freely at "Rent" (6)
20 "Fashion Closeout"? Go wild! (3,5)
21 Common Market includes unknown administrator (4)
22 Votes against any shifts before Sunday (4)

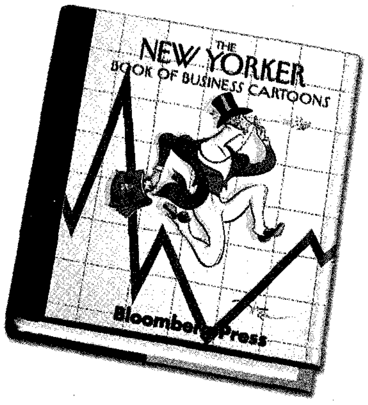
DOWN

1 Yours truly returned my award (4)
2 Praised Monet after the opening day (6)
3 Notice harbors in river (5)
5 Two articles on paintings, basically (2,5)
6 Contemporary look (4)
7 Thugs initially rob small item (6)
10 Slowly beginning to accept northern Italian poet (7)
12 Broadcast Travolta musical where some Europeans live (6)
13 Somewhere, synagogue is home to unorthodox beliefs (6)
15 Good British school board (3,2)
17 Pronouncedly regret fattening mixture (4)
18 Greek god beheaded horses (4)

• •

The solution to puzzle No. 93 appears on page 20. For a free copy of "The New Yorker's Guide to Solving Cryptic Crosswords," please send your fax number or a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Solvers' Guide," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. For an electronic version, send an E-mail to puzzleguide@newyorker.com.

Very funny business, indeed!



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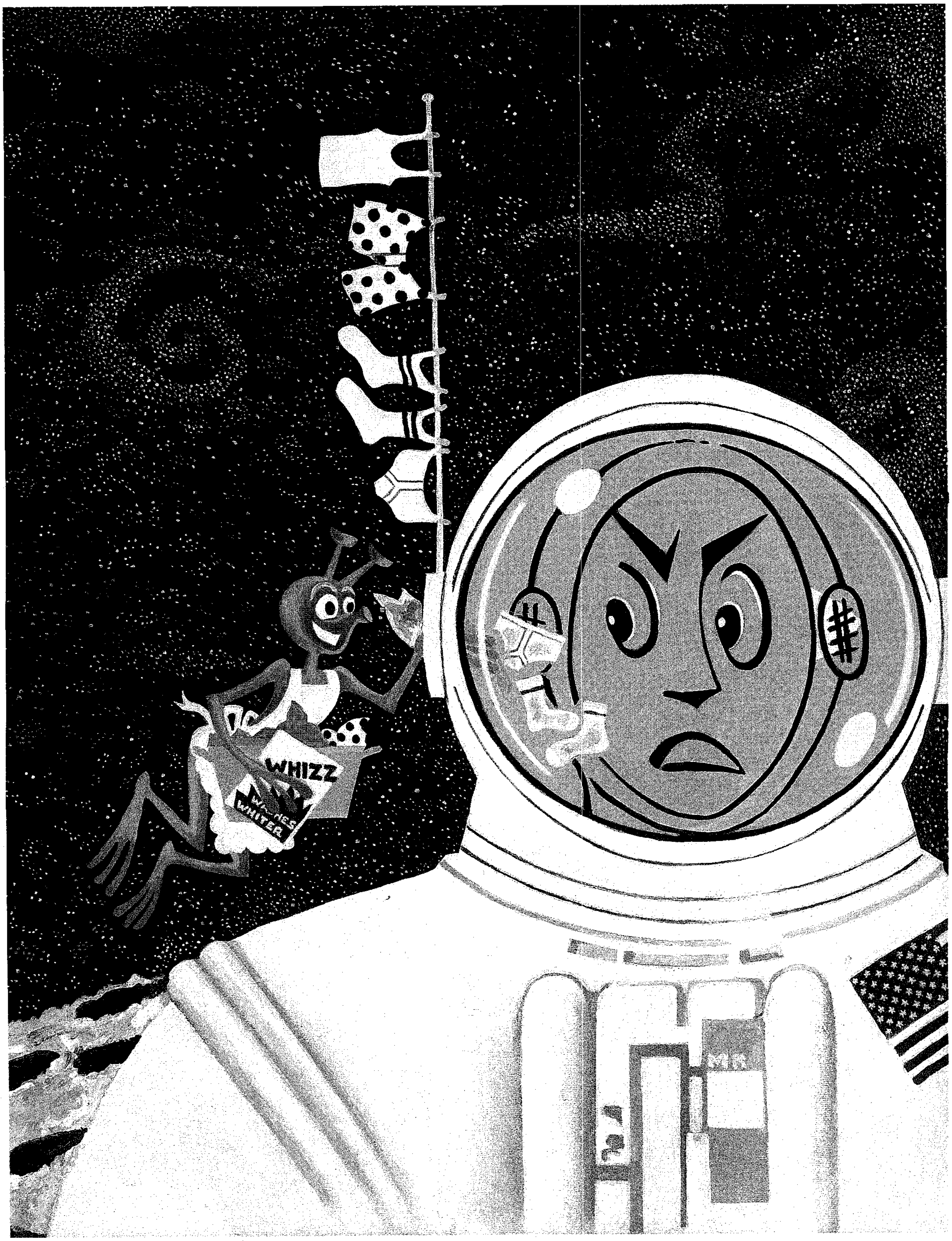
THE WHITE STUFF


WHIZZ
WASHES WHITER

Saab vs.
Oxygen Bars

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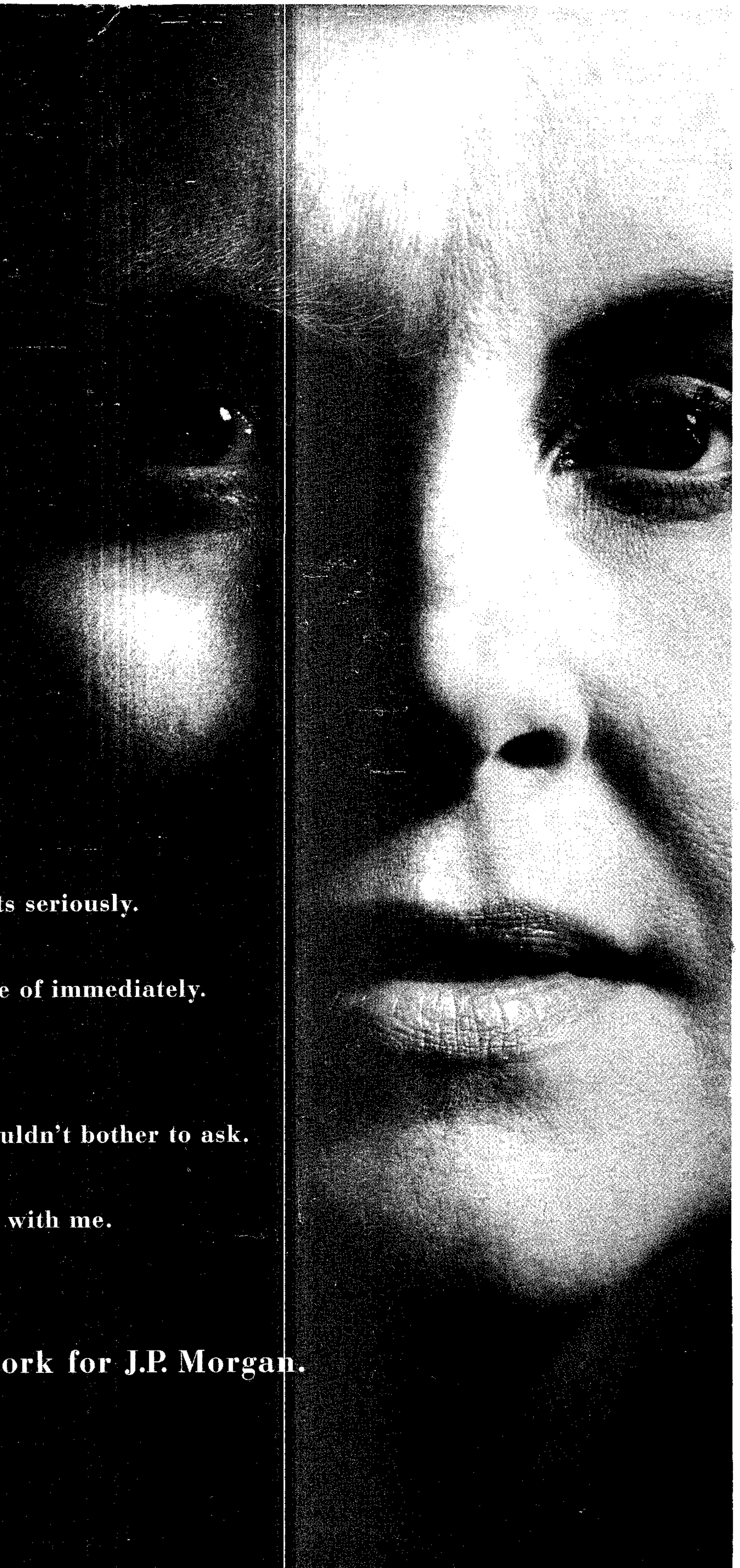

I will set standards.
Then I will exceed them.
I will yield the floor to results.

I will take my clients seriously.
And myself, less so.
I will err on the side of immediately.

I will ask questions others wouldn't bother to ask.
I will catch a wave.
I will always bring my clients with me.

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